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WON BY A CANTER

BY

OLD CALABAR

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WON IN A CANTER.

A Novel.

BY

OLD CALABAR.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
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251. b. 143.

WON IN A CANTER.

CHAPTER I.

WON IN A CANTER.

SOMETHING was up—what means this unusual bustle in this quiet country. Holiday folks in their best, rushing about. Farmers with their families in their tax-carts, well appointed mail-phaetons tooled along by their sporting owners; stylish waggonettes filled with handsome and well-dressed women; there comes Lord Verriefast's four-in-hand with his matchless greys, his Lordship on the box, and his lady beside him, looking bright and beautiful.

Close behind him is Mr. Thornhill's four-

in-hand driven by Charlie, in his warm well-made top-coat; he is pale, but much better. On the coach with him are the old gentleman and his daughter, with two or three friends. All the world and his wife are out, for be it known to you this was the day of the Wareheel Steeplechases.

Mr. and Mrs. Allsnob are in their break-waggonette, Blake driving it with Major Rasper on the box-seat; Bluster is with them looking anything but comfortable. Duffer in his high tandem cart (with one horse) is not far behind.

Lord Lavender's yellow britscha, with its scarlet-jacketed postilions rattle along; the foot people take off their hats to the nobleman and his wife, and the country dames bob a curtsey.

A cheer rends the air as Mr. and Mrs. Conyers, in their well-turned out mail-phaeton and high-stepping chestnuts, are recognised; what man more popular than a popular M. F. H. The tykes love sport, hunting, or a race of any kind has peculiar attractions for them. Then there is Lady Mary Slyfox in her new landau, with

another beautifully dressed woman beside her, her sister on a visit, both are wrapped up in costly furs, the Captain is driving; and Sir John Forest is cantering his weight-carrying cob beside them. Colonel Downey and his wife are in their pony carriage, with Mr. Pastern sitting grandly behind, as if he was a minister of state, and entrusted with the cares of the whole universe. John Turtlefat and his beautiful wife are being driven in the family carriage by a pompous, white-wigged, old coachman; Mr. Nobbleall's tax-cart, drawn by a well-known trotter, dashes by—mine host of the "Hand and Spear" has a gentleman with a broken nose and a highly-coloured eye sitting beside him, it is the Bolton Slodger, who has been terribly punished and beaten in nine rounds a few days before by the Lancashire Pet. Nevertheless, the Slodger is a great card, and as Nobbleall has a large refreshment-booth on the course, the Slodger will be a draw.

There, in an old-fashioned chariot, are seated Mr. and Miss Bullion, whom

Duffer has persuaded to go. Endless ginger-beer carts are on the road; well-mounted whips, and natty grooms; every now and then a horse is passed, warmly clothed and hooded, knee-caps on, with the helpers walking beside him, the necks of the soda-water bottles sticking out of their pockets, whilst in their hand, strapped-up, are their sponges and wipers. Nearer the scene of action, men are rushing in and out of the carriages to the iminent danger of being run over. "Card of the races, my noble lords and royal sportsmen; card of the races, names, weights, and colours of the riders—the only true and correct card."

In the distance is seen a gay array of flags. Punch, who is a little late, is jogging along with Toby at his heels, whilst his pal is putting his best foot forward with the big drum and the box of figures.

As you get nearer, there is a ceaseless din, and a perfect sea of heads, there are several large stands, but no grand stand, for the ground is shifted every year; but there is a magnificent doubled-

walled tent, with a large enclosed space. This is the tent of the hospitable members of the hunt, who give a luncheon to all their friends; then there is the dressing-tent, and the weighing tent, everything has been thought of and properly arranged. But everywhere there is an ominous notice in large letters.

"This being private property, no betting lists or stands will be allowed on the course.

By Order of the Stewards and Committee."

The Wareheel Hunt have determined, as far as possible, to put down this nuisance and evil.

Most of the carriages are drawn up close by the hunt-tent, opposite to which is the great water jump, but others have gone down to the big double. There is a perfect array of Aunt Sallies, and the steam merry-go-rounds are doing a brisk business.

There is a great row, for Mr. Nobbleall, unable to pull up his trotter quick enough, has driven over an old woman's apple-cart and sent all her almonds and nuts flying, which the mob are picking up as fast as

they can and transferring to their own pockets; one man wants to fight Mr. Nobbleall, but the Slodger coming nobly forward to his friend's assistance, offers to take the change out of him, or anyone else, for a leg of mutton and trimmings; but a couple of sovereigns from mine host of the "Hand and Spear," squares the business, and both gentlemen retire to their refreshment booth, to dispense the ale and beef at five times the price it cost. Major Rasper has been introduced to Miss Bullion by someone, much to the disgust of Duffer, he was walking in the enclosed space before the tent talking away to her.

"Ah!" he said, as Duffer came up, "yours and Bluster's match comes off first—how do you feel, old boy?"

"How do I feel, very well, what could make me otherwise. I shall win it, take you five to one."

"Lay me two, and I am on," replied the Major.

"Could not afford it, Major, but I must be off to get ready."

"What an ass that fellow is," said the

Major to his companion, as Duffer left them, "he was in ours, you know, the son of a grocer, he had to leave us."

The lady turned excessively red, but said nothing.

"What do you think, Miss Bullion," continued the Major, "that fellow is engaged to be married to Lady Verriefast's late lady's-maid," and he then told Miss Bullion the whole story; how he had signed a promise of marriage, and how she had worked him on it; the money she had come into, and where she had gone to. "She is a sweet, pretty girl, and much too good for him, Miss Bullion."

Whilst all this was going on, poor Alice was reading the following letter.

"Dear Alice.

"I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but pray do not think any more of Mr. Duffer, he is totally unworthy of you. Lord Verriefast heard yesterday that Mr. Duffer was positively engaged to Miss Bullion, a rich cotton merchant's only daughter, with a hundred thousand pounds

on her wedding day. I am told she is a nice person, but very plain—so it is clear the money is the temptation, do not break your heart about him, Alice. Mr. Bullion told Lord Verriefast about it himself, so the information I give you may be relied on as correct. I will write again in a few days and tell you all I know. I hear they are to be married immediately after our steeple-chases, which take place to-morrow. I have entered my two horses and I hope one may win, let me hear from you, and tell me you have ceased to think of this worthless man without a sigh.

"Ever your true friend,

"BESSIE VERRIEFAST."

"The Moat, Tuesday."

The girl cast away the letter, with heightened colour, "After all I have done for him," she murmured, "put in everything to make him happy and comfortable, but perhaps it serves me right," and locking up the letter, went about her work as usual.

Gentlemen are in the dressing-tent

getting ready, the first bell has rung, scores and scores of people are walking over the ground to look at the different jumps, and to place themselves in a good position.

Shirkington had put the pot on, and laid heavily against Lady Verriefast's two horses, and Mr. Nobbleall had been taking all the odds he could get.

"Do tell me, dear Charlie," said Mary Thornhill, "who is to ride my horse. Is he arrived, I feel so anxious, you cannot think—may I know his name?"

"My darling, do not agitate yourself, the gentleman who is to ride Sultan is here, but as I told you, he particularly wishes not to be known, there is a good reason for it; but let us get on to the carriage, for we must see Messrs. Duffer and Bluster's performance.

"Major Rasper, pray tell me," said Miss Bullion, as the Major was taking her to the carriage, "pray tell me if what you said about Mr. Duffer, just now, is true, about his being engaged to Lady

Verriefast's lady's maid—is it really a fact?"

"On my word as an officer and a gentleman, Miss Bullion, every word of it is true—ask anyone, the Thornhills, the Verriefasts, in fact nearly all knew it. I am astonished you should not have heard it."

"We live rather out of the way and see so few people," said the lady, with a sigh, "that we hear little of what is going on."

The second bell has rung, and the rural police and specials are clearing the course. The inevitable dog has to be chased, no one will let him through, so he bolts away amidst a thousand yells and halloes.

Both Shirkington and Muffington have been taking some jumping powder, but, notwithstanding, both look uncommonly pale.

Duffer was gorgeous in his scarlet jacket and cap, with white doe-skins, and pink tops; but Bluster is equally grand in his blue satin and white tops; both are well got up. On the card it appeared,

MATCH FOR £100 EACH, P.P.
Over four miles of fair hunting country.

S. Duffer, Esq., Bay G. Guardsman, aged. Scarlet jacket and cap. Owner.

M. Bluster, Esq., Bay G. Civilian, aged. Blue jacket and cap. Owner.

Duffer is shot on his horse by Pastern, who whispers, "Keep your pecker up, Sir, t'other horse is all right, don't you go for to cut down Mr. Bluster, wait on him, and cut his throat at the finish."

Bluster is legged up by Major Rasper, who says to him, "Keep cool, old fellow, don't force the running at too strong a pace, but lead him for a couple of miles that is once round; then let him go to the fore; but come again half a mile from home and burst him."

Of course it was necessary to show their fine feathers, to take the preliminary canter.

"T'osses is good enough," remarked a sturdy tyke, "but t'riders is nowght." But neither of the jocks thought this, the eyes of thousands were upon them, and each resolved to do or die.

Mr. Conyers is to start them, and walks them quietly away some half mile distant.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" asks the M.F.H., as he sits on his sturdy cover hack, with a little red flag in his hand.

"Quite," answers each jockey.

The red flag is dropped, and the rival candidates are dispatched on their journey.

"They're off," is shouted, as the two are seen cantering gently along. A flight of steep hurdles is the first jump, Bluster takes it lightly in advance, and Duffer follows; the next is a bank, Bluster charges it gallantly, but is shot on to the horse's withers, and hangs on by the neck. "He's off," screams a host of voices, "they're both off," roar the people, as Duffer is seen in the same position, but it is not so, both gentlemen manage to get into their seats again.

A broad smile is on all the gentlemen's faces, for they expect it.

"Go it, ye cripples," is shouted on all sides. "The tailor from Brentford—old Briggs—come to life again," all this is mixed up with wild hurrahs.

But they are both riding better now, and warmed to their work, and the next two or three jumps are well done, and they are coming at a fair pace at the water.

"Send him at it, Bluster," screams Major Rasper, as he saw his friend had not steam enough on, "Send him at it."

Bluster heard the cry and knew the voice, he did send him at it, and cleared it, but his horse fell on landing, and sent him spinning. Duffer's horse did not clear it, but fell in, giving his rider a cold bath, but both were set going nearly at the same time.

"No cock's eye out, Mr. Duffer," said Pastern, as he shot the wet gentleman into his seat, "he ain't ten lengths away, 'ave at 'im again."

Duffer soon made up lost ground, and was lying within two lengths of Civilian's girths, but both gentlemen found out that hunting and steeple-chasing are two different things—that it requires condition to ride four miles across country. They were becoming exceedingly tired; however, they kept going, several were the mishaps, but

they managed to keep within a few lengths of each other; they were now lost to the mass of people for the ground took a dip.

"Here they are again; they're a coming;" is shouted out, as the two were seen struggling along nearly a mile away. The glasses of the occupants of all the carriages are at their eyes.

"Bluster is leading," said Major Rasper, "but his horse is beat."

"So is Duffer's," exclaimed Charlie. "There is not a pin to choose between them. Can you see them, Mary?"

"Oh, yes, Charlie, I can see them beautifully; both horses and men seem utterly exhausted."

"Blue wins! Civilian wins!" roars the crowd, as Bluster takes the hurdles slightly in advance. "Red has it! Guardsman in a canter!" the race is getting exciting.

"They've both bust their horses," says Nobbleall to Pastern, "blow me if they will get them over the water. Dash it! Civilian's down!" it was a true bill, the poor horse's bolt was shot, he fell on the

landing side, and lay helplessly on the top of the rider. "The man's killed, take him away," and there is a wild rush towards him. Duffer is triumphant, he is excited. "Pick up the bits, old chap," he exclaims, as he canters towards the water.

"Drive him at it," roar out the riding men. Duffer did so, but Guardsman considered he had had enough of it; he refused and sent Duffer head over heels a second time into it, but the horse wisely remained on the taking off side. The shrieks, the shouts of laughter were anything but pleasant to Duffer's ears as he emerged from his bath.

"At him again, Sir," said the wary Pastern, "there's lots of time."

Duffer scrambled over the fence and on to the back of his tired horse. That something was up with Bluster he was aware, for there was a large crowd of people assembled where he had fallen, and he did not hurry himself; he had only to ride his horse over and win in the next field. Three times did Guardsman refuse,

but at last from the double tongueing he got from the farmer's hunting-whips, he jumped it and fell heavily on landing, throwing Duffer right through his ears. He was picked up insensible, and the poor horse got up and stood trembling but unhurt.

"He's killed! give him air!" and whips are laid about, as the crowd presses close, "give him air;" but Duffer is not killed, only stunned, and sprained in the shoulder. But he is too much shaken to get on again, and his horse is led away.

He has got off better than poor Bluster the small bone of whose leg is broken.

"A bad beginning to our meeting indeed," said Mr. Conyers to the gentlemen who were assembled in the luncheon-tent. "I hope you are not much hurt," to Duffer, who was sitting pale and trembling, with a glass of sherry in his hand. He had been stripped of his wet things, and was in his ordinary shooting-coat.

"Thank you, Mr. Conyers, not very much hurt; a little shaken, my shoulder was put out, but it is all right again.

curious thing though," attempting a sickly smile, "that neither of us should win."

After the exhibition he had made of himself, he was ashamed, and thought it better not to go near Miss Bullion, and refused an invitation of his papa-in-law elect to rest himself in his carriage.

"Come, my dear fellow," said the cotton merchant, "come to my carriage, Eliza is dying to see you;" but Duffer was firm not to move, and perhaps he was wise.

Then came the race for the Members of the Two Hunts, the same distance and over the same ground. For this there were twenty-nine entries, to be ridden by gentlemen of the hunts. It was a gay and beautiful sight to see nine-and-twenty valuable hunters stripped for this and mounted by those who could ride, in their gay and party-coloured satin jackets and caps flashing in the bright sunshine; for it was a lovely day for the time of year.

The race is described in a few words, it was well contested throughout and won

by the popular Master of the Hounds' nephew, Blake second, and Major Rasper third.

It was now all the *élite* left their carriages for the tent, where a beautiful luncheon was waiting. They were admitted by ticket, to keep those out who had no business inside the enclosure.

The Wareheel Hunt were famous for the way in which they did things, they made no great pretentions, but it was well done. It was a sort of large family party—a tent to hold three or four hundred people is not a small one—it was boarded and carpeted to keep the feet dry, double-walled, waterproof, heated, and beautifully decorated; and in the centre of the table stood on a velvet pedestal, "The Ladies' Cup," presented by the Members of the Wareheel Hunt, for ladies' hunters belonging to the two rival hunts. It was a beautiful design, and one of the best efforts of a celebrated London house.

"Oh, Charlie, how beautiful!" exclaimed, Mary Thornhill. who was leaning on the young man's arms. "It is lovely!

If I should win it how happy it would make me."

"So it would me, dearest. I hope in another hour it may be yours, Sultan was never better than he is now."

What a clatter of knives and forks, what a confusion of voices and popping of champagne corks, what a shouting for bottled beer and sherry, chicken and ham, raised Yorkshire pie, that king of good dishes.

Duffer could not make up his mind to go near his lady-love, but was seated far away at the other end of the tent; he was highly indignant to see Major Rasper by her side, so he determined to punish her and keep away.

But the business of eating and drinking gradually comes to an end, and Sir Herbert Jocelyn, the silver haired M.F.H. of the other hunt is on his legs. He has carried the horn for more than forty years, his father and his grandfather did so before him, he is universally beloved and respected, and one of the most popular men in the whole of Yorkshire.

"Ladies, my lords and gentlemen," he

commenced, "it is not usual at race meetings to make speeches, but as I know nearly all of you, and you know me, I am an old fashioned fellow and like old fashioned ways. These steeple-chases are amongst ourselves, and I look at this as a large family party, since I have carried the horn—I won't say for how many years; for it makes one look back with regret when we think of what we could have done and what we might have done. Our thoughts dwell on dear and valued friends, dead and gone—we remember we are getting old, and that we must in our turn be run to earth. No, it will not do to look back, the present and the future is enough for me. I cannot but thank my dear old friend Conyers and the gentlemen of the Wareheel Hunt, on behalf of myself and members of my hunt, who have never yet had a misunderstanding with yours, (cheers) for the very handsome and liberal manner you have entertained us to-day. We have never snarled at each other because one hunt may have had a few more noses nailed to the kennel doors than

another, we have been above such paltry feelings (Cheers).

"I regret exceedingly that the first race to-day should have been attended with such serious consequences — at least to one gentleman, but I am glad, and so I am sure are you all that it is no worse.

"When I cast my eyes on that beautiful cup, and knowing as I do that it is for ladies' hunters, and seeing around me so many who wish to possess it, I cannot but regret that you cannot all win it (cheers), but I am selfish enough to hope it may be borne away by a lady of my hunt. I know you will forgive me for saying this, but it is a trophy to be envied. All I can say is, may the best horse win. I will detain you no longer than to propose the health of my old friend Conyers, and the ladies and gentlemen of the Wareheel Hunt, in the old style—three times three."

Then such a shout arose as made the walls of the tent vibrate. The dirty unwashed outside, hearing cheers were going on, thought it their duty to cheer too,

which they accordingly did for at least five minutes.

Then Mr. Conyers returned thanks in a short speech, saying how much pleasure it had given him and the gentlemen of his hunt to see them there, and that he sincerely hoped and felt assured the two hunts would always remain on the same friendly footing they had for so many years, that unanimity was strength, and that as long as they pulled together as they had done, there would never be want of foxes in their counties, and he thought he might say, without boast or bombast, that both hunts had as few blanks as any two packs of hounds in the United Kingdom, and he concluded by proposing the health of the ladies, which was responded to by the youngest unmarried man at table.

They then arose and walked in the enclosure. Aunt Sally and eighteen sticks for sixpence was in full force again; Punch and Toby fighting away; the merry-go-rounds and swings crammed to suffocation; the lads shooting for nuts for their sweethearts; and anchor, heart and spade

was being conveyed off the ground by two rural bobbies for gambling; the negro minstrels warbling "Old Dan Tucker," and the bones and banjo in their glory; pretty gipsies taking the round of the carriages, and trying to induce their occupants to have their fortunes told, and to cross a poor gipsy-woman's hands with silver, my lucky gentlemen, or beautiful lady; a thimble-rig table was driving a brisk trade under the friendly shelter of a high hedge, and a little further on a set of ruffians were robbing the unwary at the three card trick; the beer and ginger-beer carts were nearly emptied of their contents already; and the Bolton Slodger had informed Mr. Nobbleall that the beef and hale was quite out, to which that worthy replied that a fresh lot was coming up in the van, which consoled the Slodger.

The riding-men who were engaged for the Ladies' Cup have disappeared to array themselves in their riding gear—all except Charlie, who was still seated by his cousin's side.

"I must go now, dearest, and look

after your horse, he is a little restive in company. He will not be cantered past the stand, but be saddled down near the starting field in the little hollow."

"Oh, Charlie, I am so nervous," she said, "I hope the gentleman you put up will use him well. I almost wish he was not entered, if anything should happen to him, I should never forgive myself."

"Nothing, Mary, will happen to him, depend upon it. My dear uncle don't let Mary excite herself, you may depend that the gentleman who rides him will do his duty by 'Sultan,' and if possible render a good account of himself."

"I'll take care of her, Charlie. There go away, for you have not much time."

CHAPTER II.

WON IN A CANTER.

NEVER did a race cause more excitement amongst those who were engaged in it than the Ladies' Cup, which was now displayed in front of the stewards' stand, a little wooden building put up for the occasion.

How the crowd crushed to get a peep at it, and many a longing eye was turned towards it.

The race on the card was,

THE LADIES' CUP.

Value 200 sovs., presented by the gentlemen of the Wareheel Hunt for horses regularly hunted for the last month, and *bona fide*, the property of ladies of the Wareheel and Fly-away Hunts, entrance 5 sovs. each P.P., over the same course as the Members cup plate, about four

miles. Gentlemen riders' entrance money to go to the second horse.

Lady Lavender's B. G. Tom Thumb, aged. Black jacket and cap. Lord Wildman.

Lady Slyfox's G. G. Harkaway, aged. White jacket and cap. Mr. Sharp.

Lady Verriefast's C. G. Stranger, aged. Blue jacket and white sleeves, blue cap. Mr. Sulivan.

Lady Verriefast's B. G. My Lord, 6 years. Blue jacket, white sleeves, blue and white cap. Hon. G. Cole.

Miss Thornhill's C. G. Sultan, 6 years. Scarlet jacket, purple sleeves, black cap.

Mrs. Allsnob's B. G. Old Ireland, aged. Green jacket and cap. Mr. Blake.

Mrs. Allsnob's C. G. Paddy, 6 years. Green jacket, white cap. Major Rasper.

Mrs. Conyers' B. M. Hope, aged. Scarlet jacket and cap. Mr. Fred. Greenway.

Miss Dutchbild's C. M. Small Hopes, aged. Yellow jacket and cap. Major Bouncer Brag.

Mrs. Merry's B. M. Gipsy King, 5 years. Green body, yellow sleeves, black cap. Mr. Winkworth.

Lady Jocelyn's B. G. Stole Away, 6 years. Black body, white sleeves, white cap. Mr. Nesbit.

Miss George's B. G. The Beau, aged. Pink body, black sleeves, orange cap. Mr. C. Slap.

Miss Darley's C. G. Old York, aged. Purple body, white sleeves, crimson cap. Captain Passingham.

All the gentlemen but one are weighed out, and are engaged with their different animals in the enclosure, but a man as he sees the weighing tent empty, enters it

with a saddle, and a tall pale young man follows quickly after him, he throws his top coat and goloshes off, and seats himself in the weighing-chair.

"Surely, Sir," says the clerk of the scales, "you are not going to do it, it's madness—don't think of it."

"Hold your row, Johnson; eleven two do I draw it?"

"All right, Sir, I'm sorry to see you, upon my word I am."

"If you say one single syllable, Johnson, I'll never speak to you again," and he hastily put on his goloshes and top coat, over the *scarlet jacket* and *purple sleeves;* the cap he gave his man, he then drew on a pair of overalls, completely hiding his breeches and boots, and putting his hat on, mounted a cob, and rode away.

"Now then, look alive," he said, as the man with the saddle and saddle-cloth came down to the little hollow where Sultan was being walked about, "There's no time to lose."

The horse was quickly got ready, and the pale young man unbuttoned his over-

alls and threw off his top coat, put on the black velvet cap, and stood revealed the picture of a gentleman jockey; he was quickly legged up, and one could see at a glance Sultan was well mounted by a masterhand. "Tell them Sultan is gone down to the starting field," he said, as he rode away, "but mind for your life don't mention who is up. Here, Jones, put on my top-coat, and come with me."

"All right, Sir," said the man. "Blessed if he ain't a pluckey one," the helpers uttered, as they look at the receding figure of the rider of Sultan.

All the numbers are up on the telegraph board — thirteen of them. "Where is Sultan?" is asked by many, but it is said that the horse is a little restive, and has gone to post, and will not take his preparatory canter.

"Ah! there he is!" exclaimed the excited Mary Thornhill, "there he is, papa—and Charlie walking beside him. I know him by his grey top-coat; poor fellow, he feels the disappointment at not being able to ride."

"I am sure he does, Mary," replied her father, "but he will do all he can for you, in seeing the horse properly saddled, and giving instructions to his friend how to ride him. I hope with all my heart you will win."

What a pretty sight it is to see the gay jackets flashing in the sun, as horse after horse comes striding by the enclosure and carriages. Mr. Blake looks like a workman all over; his firm seat and resolute bearing denotes this is nothing new to him.

Major Rasper too seems cut out for business, and one accustomed to the pigskin; as much cannot be said of Bouncer Brag who appeared anything but comfortable and ill at ease. Miss Dutchbild has great faith in Small Hopes, and has already bet several dozen pairs of gloves. The Ladies Lavender and Slyfox take it quietly, and sit perfectly unconcerned in their carriages, at least they appear so; not so with Lady Verriefast, she is evidently greatly excited, as is Mary Thornhill—the two have got together on the top of his Lordship's drag, and are eagerly scanning each horse.

Her Ladyship's eye followed her two horses as they swept by, mounted by Mr. Sulivan and the Honourable G. Cole, two of the best riders of the day.

"By Gad!" exclaims Colonel Downey, from his pony carriage, "it's a magnificent sight! it's a beautiful sight if we could only see; but look, my dear," to his wife, "your daughter is telegraphing us to go to their drag," and the old militaire trotted off with his better half to take up a "position" as he called it.

A quiet rider is Mr. Fred Greenway, as he cantered his horse by, both were much fancied, they looked so thoroughly business-like.

"In tip-top fettle is Hope," said a good judge, "he will be there or thereabouts."

All the riders, save Bouncer Brag, are good and well-known men across country, and a close and exciting finish was anticipated.

Mr. Pastern presuming on his master and mistress going to Lady Verriefast's drag, clambers up on the hind seat.

"Who the deuce has Charlie put on Sultan?" demands Lord Lavender. "The rider, whoever he is, is in the starting-field with Charlie walking beside him; the horse is not fretful, he is as quiet as a lamb as far as I can see."

Wagers are being made, Sultan, in spite of the mystery relating to his rider, has the call in the betting. Mr. Nobbleall is taking all the odds he can get from his farmer acquaintances. The horses are returning back one by one, and going towards the starting-field. Mr. Conyers is seen to mount his cob, and take his flag in hand. What an anxious quarter of an hour is passed, as the horses and riders walk quietly to the starting-field. Sultan is still at the far end, and keeps there till all are arrived, then he comes up and joins the rest, a look of universal astonishment is on the countenance of everyone.

Mr. Conyers exclaims, "Good G—d! you don't mean it do you?" Foolish, madness," others say, "Who would have thought it?" "It's a case." "Kill him to a certainty." "Poor fellow." "What pluck." "Deserves

to win," and so on; but the rider of Sultan is determined, go he will. They are up in line, the flag is dropped, and the race for the Ladies' Cup has began.

"They're off," is yelled from the throats of hundreds, "hats off in front." What a moment of breathless excitement. Mary Thornhill and all the rest of her lady friends have their glasses glued to their eyes; the flight of the hurdles is taken by all, but at the next fence, the bank, "Small Hopes" is down, and Bouncer Brag is knocked out.

Five or six are conspicuous in the front rank; two green jackets, a scarlet and purple sleeves, and all scarlet, are to the fore. The rider of Sultan, he in scarlet body and purple sleeves, is deadly pale, but there is an elegance of seat and manner of riding that catches the eye of those who know anything about it. Mary Thornhill's glasses are fixed on her favourite, and her face blanches as she distinguishes the rider.

"Oh, papa! Oh, Lady Verriefast! God preserve me! Charlie is riding Sultan."

"No, no, my dear, it can't be—it's impossible!" ejaculates the old gentleman. "Poor fellow, he will not be able to ride for many a day again."

"Papa, dear papa, it *is* him! I am not deceived, I know him amongst ten thousand."

"She is right!" exclaims Lady Verriefast. "What madness! stop him, someone."

"Thornhill is up!" is uttered by a hundred voices. The glasses have spotted him. There he was, riding 'Sultan' in his thorough artistic way. A magnificent horseman he was. The water jump is approached, and scarlet body and purple sleeves, half turning his head to take stock, dropped his hand and sent the chestnut gelding at it; his jacket flashed in the air, and he was over, Blake and Major Rasper landed at the same moment, all got over without mishap, for the horses had no green hands on them.

What a screaming and shouting, "Charlie Thornhill, Mr. Thornhill is up," is roared out by hundreds of hoarse and maddened

voices. But Mary heard it not, she had fainted away, and her father was sobbing aloud. "It's his death," piteously exclaimed the old gentleman, "poor mad boy! after all our care and anxiety too."

Never were people in such a state of frantic excitement. Large burning patches appeared on the cheeks of all his friends, both ladies and gentlemen, and horsemen were galloping wildly to the different jumps.

"By G—d! he's the finest fellow in England," is uttered by one of the Stewards in their stand; Lords Verriefast and Lavender, Sir John Forest, Captain Slyfox and Sir Herbert Jocelyn were there, "but it will kill him; after his illness, his lingering for months between life and death, it's madness; absolute madness!"

Shirkington Duffer has mounted, in spite of his pain, on the Allsnobb's break-waggonette. His sole thoughts were hoping Major Rasper might come to grief, and that Lady Verriefast's horses might be choked off and nowhere; but the riders, at least to the carriages, were now lost to view, and Shirkington could not tell if his

charitable wish had been gratified. Mary Thornhill is brought to by eau-de-Cologne, and her friends' salts bottle, but she is deadly pale and fearfully excited.

Thousands of eyes are now straining to see them coming over the brow of the hill. There are yells and counter yells. "Black's first; no it ain't," from two urchins up a tree, "it's yellow, no it aint, it's red and blue, now it's green, it's scarlet, they're all of a lump."

Presently a cap is seen rising the hill, then another, and another, then began the excitement of the multitude again, such frantic yells from the stalwart throats of the Tykes. The Tykes know how to holloa.

All glasses are levelled towards the flight of coming riders. The ladies whose horses are engaged are trembling with emotion, their husbands are nearly as bad, and those who have no husbands are ten times worse. It is piteous to behold Mary Thornhill, supported by her father, her beautiful features deathly, wan and blanched, and her glorious eyes dim with tears—a sight piteous to behold, and one ill-suited to the

festive scene. Alas! how many hearts are bursting with hopes and fears at all races? But public attention is given to the coming horsemen, and she is not much regarded. Only three are in sight; a scarlet with purple sleeves, a green and black cap, and a scarlet jacket and cap. But another green and white cap mounts the hill.

"Sultan wins it! Thornhill wins it!" is screamed out by hundreds of eager beholders.

"We are safe," whispers Pastern to Nobbleall, who, in the excitement of the moment, has climbed up beside his friend. "Lady Verriefast's 'osses not even in sight, another twenty quid in our pockets, safe as the bank."

"Hold your row, you fool, and keep your d——d mouth shut!" mutters Mr. Nobbleall, who had been drinking heavily, and whose utterance was somewhat thick and indistinct. "Shut up, or I'll put the Slodger on to you. Time enough to holler when we're out of the wood. A race is never won till it's lost, stoopid, is it?"

"Red has it! green has it!" is the cry,

as three horses are seen closely locked together, with a fourth in close attendance. The hurdle is approached, and the race now is terrific. Blake charges it first, nearly comes a cropper, for his horse hits it; but by sheer fine riding he is saved. Scarlet and purple sleeves takes it next, with yellow on his whip hand, and Major Rasper flies it only a length behind. He is stealing upon the leading horses—figuratively stealing—a table-cloth might cover them. But a change comes over the order of things. Scarlet and purple sleeves forges to the front.

"Mary, dear Mary!" exclaims Lady Verriefast, to her friend; "look up, dearest, your horse is winning. I am so glad."

Shout after shout; scream after scream rends the air, as the four came nearer and nearer.

"Well ridden, Thornhill!" bursts from the throats of thousands.

Well ridden, indeed, as the young man is seen as motionless as a statue on his noble animal. He was not riding him. No spur or whip had touched him as yet.

Sir John Forest sits on his cob, unable to utter a word. He is praying Charlie may get safely over the water. The four are together. A splendid race, with a wild Irish hurroo Blake sends his horse at the brook, but it is not in him to get over—he jumps short, and is plunging about in the water; so is Major Rasper, whose horse is struggling to get out; yellow hits him and both roll over.

But where is Thornhill? He has taken the brook on the near side. The noble horse cleared it in his stride, and Charlie, turning in his saddle, and seeing all is safe, takes a pull at his horse and eases him.

The cheers, the yells that rend the air again, as he canters past the winning-post the easiest of winners—literally *won in a canter*. Yellow comes in for the second money, and Blake is placed third. Thornhill is deadly pale, and one of his hands is pressed to his side, as if suffering. Sir John Forest rushes to his horse's head.

"By gad, Charlie!" exclaimed the breathless Baronet, "you won it like a trump,

but you have killed yourself!" And seeing the young man on the point of fainting, called out, "Some one fetch a glass of brandy! A guinea for a glass of brandy!"

But Thornhill knew what he had to do, though the liquor was brought, not a drop did he touch, but sat his horse quietly, as it was led along by Sir John past the judge's box, and then into the enclosure. A hand was resting on each thigh, and it is no figure of speech to say that although his gallant horse looked comparatively fresh, his rider appeared dying. He unsaddled Sultan, walked into the weighing tent, with the traps on his arm, and sat in the weighing-chair. "Sultan," he said, in a faint voice, "eleven two."

"Right, Sir," replied the clerk of the scales, "quite right, but you are very ill."

Charlie rose from the chair, but as he did so, he fell heavily to the ground.

"Carry him into the big tent," said Sir John, "he has fainted away, don't let anyone know," but this was not so easy; for in less time than it takes to write this,

it was flying about the course that Mr. Thornhill was dead. Lords Lavender and Verriefast, Captain Slyfox, Mr. Conyers, and old Mr. Thornhill were soon in the tent to see what was the matter, but Charlie was coming to.

"Run to my cousin, Mary," he said, "and tell her it is nothing but a faintness, which is passing away. Will some one kindly give me a little water, I shall be all right in five minutes."

He had soon his racing togs off, and a glass of sherry set him all square again. His friends crowded about him, and shout after shout rent the air, as he appeared from the tent buttoned up in his top coat, and leaning on the arm of his uncle. He had a large morroco leather case under his arm in which was the Ladies' Cup, and which he had won in such a gallant manner.

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie, how could you do such a thing?" asked his cousin, as he appeared beside her father's coach. She was seated inside and had been crying. "I will never forgive you, never, this will be the death of you."

"Never mind, dearest, I am all right," taking his seat beside her, "look in this case, there is the cup, your own. I had hard work to pull it off, for I am not so strong as I thought I was, but I really do not think the gallop has done me a bit of harm."

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie, you dear, good naughty fellow!" she was weeping and laughing by turns, "so you have won it for me? Oh, how beautiful it is."

"I won it, dearest, as I won you."

"And how was that?" she asked, looking at him archly.

"It was, my pet, *won in a canter.*"

"Ah! you vain fellow, but I won't scold for I am too delighted; and if you only tell me you are not the least hurt, and do not feel the least bit the worse, I shall be quite happy."

"Then, Mary, I think I can answer you by saying I feel better. There, examine your treasure! I am going to see Sultan off, and have a look at the Farmers' race, which is the last on the card."

"Hope you're not hurt much, Sir," said

Pastern, touching his hat, as Duffer was walking along the course.

"Not much, Pastern; the pain is going off. I know what you want. Not here; to-morrow, at my place."

"Wasn't it done beautiful, Sir?" asked the fellow, in a confidential tone.

"Yes, very well. How did you manage it?"

"No matter, Sir; we did manage it; and rare trouble we had, too. If we had not done things cleverly, my lord would 'av won, ard 'eld"——

One and all were glad Thornhill got the Ladies' Cup for his cousin, for they knew the relations in which they stood.

"It is the pluckiest thing, Bessie, I ever saw," said Lord Verriefast to his wife. "He deserved to win. The fact is, that independent of his fine riding, Sultan is one of the best horses in England. I am sure you do not begrudge Thornhill his victory; it was a hardly earned one. I only hope, poor fellow, it will not hurt him. I shall give you a bracelet as a salve for your disappointment."

"My dear George, I really and truly am delighted he has won; and I can assure you I do not feel the least disappointed. But I cannot help thinking that something is wrong with Mr. Duffer and Miss Bullion, he has not been near her all day, and Major Rasper has been in constant attendance on her. What fun it would be if she was to give my old admirer the go-bye."

It was quite true that the Major was in close attendance on the rich heiress. A hundred thousand is not picked up every day, and the Major had decided in his own mind to make Miss Bullion Mrs. Rasper, if he could. He was quite certain she had done with Shirkington; and if she had not, it would not have made much difference to him, for he would have made his effort.

The Major was not a needy man. He had a fair income of his own, independent of his profession.

Miss Bullion was highly incensed with Duffer; and before the last race had been run she had told her father everything.

"Major Rasper told me all about it,

papa. Shirkington Duffer was in his regiment, and Colonel Downey told me as well. He was sweet on Lady Verriefast at one time, and threw her over because she had no money; and when he found out she had, tried to put matters right. But she gave him the cold shoulder. He is a horrible fellow. I have done with him for ever."

"Quite right, my dear; quite right. I will go and find the Major out, and ask him to return with us to dine and sleep."

This was exactly what the Major wanted, and he accepted at once. That very evening, over their wine, he proposed to Papa Bullion for his daughter's hand. The cotton merchant was delighted at the idea of a Major, with an early probability of his being a Lieutenant-Colonel, as a husband for his daughter! True, he was not so well off as Duffer; but he had eight hundred a-year and his pay, so it would not be so bad after all."

"There, there, old fellow!" the cotton lord exclaimed, "I know all you would say —every shilling of her money to be settled

upon herself, and all that. Go to Eliza and tell her yourself, and I—I—will remain here and finish the port."

The Major pleaded his cause, and successfully, too. The young lady was by no means averse to the change. She would have married anyone in her then state of mind, for she was more than angry at having been the dupe of Duffer.

"By Jupiter!" thought the Major, as he rolled himself up in his sheets. "I have done it now. Fancy a hundred thousand; how I have bowled out this cad, Shirkington Duffer, to be sure. What a stud of horses I shall have—not too large a one, but one bang up to the mark. I'll cut the service, and take a nice place with a little land; grow my own oats, and all that sort of thing," and so thinking, fell asleep.

When he awoke in the morning, he began to turn matters over in his mind; he had so far got the pull of Duffer, but that gentleman might come with a rush and beat him on the post—so he resolved to press the matter, take the young lady

by storm, and get married out of hand at once.

Poor Major Rasper! There was no such hurry, for Duffer was a hundred miles or more on his way to London.

"By Jupiter!" laughed the Major to himself, as he stood carefully looking at his beard, for he thought he had discovered a grey hair. "What an infernal rage Duffer will be in when he knows it; luckily duelling is out of date, though I don't think he would have called me out. I never had such an easy job in my life—a walk over—literally *won in a canter*."

After breakfast the Major pressed his suit warmly, and proposed being married quietly at once. "The Regiment," he said, "is sure to get the route in a few days for India, and then it will be impossible to sell, or send in my papers; if we are married at once, we will go to London, and I can then manage everything satisfactorily."

Duffer, on arriving home after the steeplechase, found a telegram which necessitated his starting to London at once;

so packing up his portmanteau, gave a few directions, told his steward to let Pastern know, when he called next day, that he would be away for a week, ordered his cart, and wrote the following note to Miss Bullion.

"My dearest Eliza,

"I have just been called up to town, and shall be absent for about a week; it is to arrange about a little bit of my late father's property, which is still unsold. Seeing you were so taken up to-day with old bottle-nosed Rasper, I did not come near you. I hope he will not be poking about when I return. Send the old rake to the right about.

"Ever yours,

"SHIRKINGTON DUFFER.

"The Cottage, Tuesday evening."

The Major was walking in the garden the next morning with his lady love, when this note was given her, and she could not help laughing.

"Something amuses you," he said. "May I know what it is?"

"Oh, certainly, Major, only you must not get very angry—you promise that," and she gave him the note.

"The infernal cad," he blurted out, when he had mastered its contents; and getting purple with rage, and clapping his hand instinctively on his nose, which certainly was somewhat of the tint Shirkington had described it; "the infernal cad, I'll bottle-nose him—I'll old rake him."

"Now, Major, remember you promised not to get angry; what does it matter? let him alone; he is not worth yours or any one else's notice," and she hooked her arm into that of the angry soldier, and walked him off to see her golden, and Japanese pheasants.

"Lord and Lady Verriefast, Mary," said Mr. Thornhill, when they got home, "are going for a yachting cruise; they have asked you, I and Charlie to join them. How would you like it? it would do poor Charlie an immense deal of good; there is nothing going on here. What do you say?"

"I should like it of all things, that is if Charlie would go, for, of course, in his present state, he could not be left alone; he will be down directly, and we will try and persuade him; poor fellow, he is dreadfully fatigued, but in great spirits at having won the cup for me."

Charlie did not require much persuading; "A trip of this kind," he said, "although it is rather early in the season, will do me all the good in the world; but where do they propose going."

"Their present idea, Charlie, is to start from Scarborough. Verriefast's yacht is at Cowes; but she will come up. He says by the time she arrives they will have got her into proper sailing trim; then we shall go to Cowes again: so on to Plymouth, Cornwall, and away to the Mediterranean, stopping at Gibraltar; it will be a delightful trip, and on returning we stop at various ports of the Spanish and Portuguese coast. If we go, I wanted to bear our share of the expenses, but Verriefast would not hear of it. We shall start about the first week in April; she is a

beautiful schooner, is the 'Firefly,' over two hundred tons, so there will be every comfort, and plenty of room; not a fisherman's walk, three steps and overboard. I shall tell him we accept."

Mary was delighted at the idea, and Charlie was as much pleased; he knew it would be the making of him, and did not care where he went as long as his darling was with him.

He was a young man who was not given to gadding about. He liked pleasure as well as anyone else, when it came in his way; but homely in his ideas, attached to country life, he was never happier than when engaged in field and sporting pursuits.

Of his riding we have had a specimen, and he was just as good a shot, fisherman and cricketer—in fact, he was an admirable Crichton as far as all sporting was concerned.

The country papers were loud in their praise of him, of the artistic way in which he had piloted Sultan to victory, and the London papers took it up; but Messrs.

Bouncer Brag, Duffer and Bluster were most horribly ridiculed. Bluster had sense enough to see he was no horseman, and resolved for the future to content himself with a little hunting in a general way. He was not a bad fellow, but he was not cut out either to ride steeple-chases, or take a lead in sporting matters.

"You're a good fellow," said Major Rasper to him one day, "your head is in the right place; but don't be offended with me, old fellow, you are no horseman. I don't mean to say you ought not to ride, far from it, and have your hunting like other men, but don't go in for public performances. Now Duffer is such a conceited ass, that he has got the idea he can ride, and nothing will talk him out of it; there is not one single thing he can do well, except lie and crane."

Shirkington had pretty much the same opinion of the Major. "Bottle-nosed old humbug," he said to himself. "I suppose he thought he was going to put my nose out with Eliza, just as if she would have

anything to do with such an old fogy as he is; why he is five-and-forty if he is a day. Poor Alice, though, she will break her little heart when she hears I am married; it's an infernal pity, but I cannot forgive her the way she served me about that letter; but then she has not a hundred thousand pounds—coin is my idea of life."

When he got to town, the first thing he did was to pay a visit to his tailor and order his wedding suit. Then he looked in on his man of business in Bedford Row, and found it would take at least five days before the matter he came up for could be completed. "I've half a mind to go down and see Alice, but it won't do," and perhaps it was just as well for him he did not.

In the meantime, things were going on in Yorkshire he little thought of. He was highly indignant at the sporting papers for the way they spoke about him, so sat down and wrote letters to the editors, but which they did not put in or even notice.

His business being finished, he hurried back to Yorkshire, for notwithstanding all he said or wrote, he had a misgiving and mistrust of Rasper.

Taking an afternoon train, and installing himself in a first class smoking carriage, he commenced one of the famous regalias he had purchased in Bond Street.

As the train was starting, another gentleman entered, "Are you going far, Sir," he asked of Duffer.

"To Yorkshire," answered that gentleman.

"So am I, but just in time to be too late. I intended to have been there last week, and present at the Wareheel steeple-chases; it must have been capital fun; there was a match between two gentlemen for a hundred a-side. I had a paper sent me with a full account; it says the whole course was convulsed with laughter at the performances of these two. The tailor's ride to Brentford was a trifle to it, but that Mr. Thornhill, ill as he was, rode one of the finest races that was ever seen. What a glorious fellow he is. I know him

well. How he must have laughed at these two muffs."

Pleasant news for Duffer to hear, but he kept his mouth shut; for he was completely knocked out of time.

CHAPTER III.

BOWLED OUT.

SHIRKINGTON arrived home about eight in the morning, did his tub, breakfast, looked over his letters which had come in his absence, read not very flattering accounts of his, Bluster's, and Bouncer Brag's performances at the late steeple-chase in the local papers, then ordered his cart, and drove away on a visit to his beloved one.

"My time will be up at the cottage the week after next," he said to himself, "and then, D.I.O., I shall send the horses down to my old quarters at Brighton, and sell all but the two I had from Allsnob. I suppose I shall have to buy a couple of carriage ones for Madame. She will be

wanting an open carriage and a brougham. I'll buy them second-hand though, and have them repainted and varnished with the crest on. I must find out this morning what carriages she will like, and send off to London at once, so that there may be no delay."

It was thus he built castles in the air as he drove along. In due time he pulled up at the cotton king's door, and throwing his reins to the man who came round from the stable yard, rung at the bell.

"Are all well?" he asked of the footman who answered the summons.

"Quite well, Sir. You are just in time."

"Just in time," thought Duffer; "what the devil does the fellow mean?"

However, there was not much time for surmising, for he was shown into the breakfast-room. Mr. Bullion was seated at the head of the table; at the other end was Major Rasper. On his right hand was Miss Bullion; Mrs. Downey on the right of the host, the Colonel on his left, and two young ladies in white on either

side of the table; Bluster between two, and Bouncer Brag between the other two. All seemed excessively jolly. But their laughter and merriment was cut short on the appearance of Shirkington.

Colonel Downey stared aghast at him, with a bit of cold pheasant on his fork, his mouth open, which he was unable to shut from astonishment. The host turned almost purple; his daughter was nearly fainting. Mrs. Downey kept her face fixed on her plate, and seemed to be particularly pleased at something thereon; and the four young ladies nestled as close as they could to Messrs. Bluster and Brag.

Duffer stood looking with the utmost astonishment from one to the other; he could not make it out, or had he the slightest suspicion of what was the meaning of it all.

"I am afraid," said he, at last, "I have disturbed a merry party."

"Yes, Sir, you have," at length pompously drawled out the host. "You are as unexpected as—as—I must say it—as you are unwelcome. We have heard of

all your doings, Sir; you had better go back to Miss Lee, Sir. Make the *amende honorable* there. How dare you have proposed to my daughter, Sir, when you were engaged to another?"

"Good heavens, Mr. Bullion—Eliza."

"No, hang it, old fellow!" exclaimed the Major, rising, and displaying his new blue frock coat and light waistcoat. He was got up regardless of expense. "No, hang it, old fellow! I can put up with a great many things, but I cannot allow my wife to be called by her christian name by you. There must be some limit, you know. Upon my soul there must."

"What?" almost screamed Jack. "Your wife?"

"Just so, Duffer," put in the Colonel. "They're just married, they are, by gad! All quiet, you know, as it should be amongst friends. By gad, your presence here is singularly ill-timed; it is, by gad!"

No one else said a word; they were too taken aback.

"By heaven, Major Rasper, you shall answer to me for this; you shall hear

from me," at length Shirkington said, quivering and white with passion. "A scoundrel's trick!" And he stalked majestically from the room. He was hard on others, but never thought of the scoundrel's trick he had played Alice.

The hilarity of the party had received a check; the appetite of the breakfasters was spoilt. The bride melted into tears, and required all the attendance of her bridesmaids, and the Colonel and the Major discovered they required a mild stimulant in the shape of laced tea. The host seemed ill at ease; he kept biting his fingers, and was plunged in deep thought.

The party presently broke up, and the bride and bridegroom on their way to London.

Mrs. Rasper, though no beauty, was a nice person, well educated, agreeable in manners, and of even temper.

"By George, Eliza," said the Major, as they were being whirled along at five-and-forty miles an hour, "what a rage Duffer was in. I never yet saw him in such a passion."

"You will not take any notice of anything he may say or do?" she asked.

"Oh no, Eliza; I promise you that. I have played him a trick, you know, and therefore I must not be hard on him; but it is no more than he deserves. Look how he treated Alice Lee."

On arriving in London they put up at Long's Hotel, where it had been agreed before hand they were to go.

The Major was in high glee. For years he had been looking for a woman with money, and at last his wish had been accomplished; but, alas! how soon was this pleasant vision to be dispelled.

They were quietly seated at a somewhat late breakfast next morning, and complaining of the wretchedness of the weather. It was a dull dead day, and the rain coming down in a ceaseless torrent.

"This is enough to make one cut one's throat," exclaimed the Major. "Never mind, Lizzie," he had taken to call his wife Lizzie, "we will go to some of the picture galleries, or anywhere you like. It is unfortunate this weather; but we

shall find plenty to do. I must go to my agents and see about selling out, for I don't intend being bundled out to India."

At this moment a telegram was handed him. It was from his wife's father, and ran thus:—

"Don't sell out till you hear from me; you will receive a letter to-morrow morning."

"What the deuce can the old gentleman mean?" asked he, giving his wife the paper. "Of course I must sell out; but there is no hurry for a day. He is so bent on money-making, that he does not like the idea of my quitting the service; but I have been in harness long enough."

Mrs. Rasper had never seen much of London, so her husband found no difficulty in amusing her. They went to the Haymarket, and came home to a snug little supper.

"When we get a house of our own, Lizzie," he said, "a nice place, not too large, nor too far from a good country town. I will give you a month here,

and then we will see everything."

The letters were at this moment brought, one for the Major, and one for his wife.

"From your father, Lizzie," he remarked, as his eye caught the post-mark.

"So is mine," she said.

The Major turned deadly pale as he read his letter.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, "what an awful thing."

As for his wife, she lay sobbing on the sofa.

"Never mind, old lady," he said, "it is very bad, and certainly a great blow, but we must look misfortune boldly in the face. Cheer up, we can yet cut a respectable figure; of course I shall not sell out now, so you will have a chance of seeing India."

"Oh, Rasper," she cried, "what misery—what wretchedness; what can you think of me, of poor papa—what will he do? I care not for myself, only for you and him. You will think I am an impostor.

God knows I knew nothing of it; I had not the least idea."

"My dear Lizzie, I am sure you did not," seating himself beside her. "Just listen to me. I will not deny that it is a great blow to me, and so it must be to you. I will not deny that when I proposed to you, your money was an attraction; but I have learned to love you for yourself alone since then. We must make the best of it. We are not so badly off after all. I have eight hundred a year without my pay, and I shall be a Colonel very shortly, so I think we can manage—there now, don't give way. I will read you your father's letter."

"Cottenford, Yorkshire, March 12.

"My dear Major,

"I hardly know how to write, or what to say, because I now feel I should have told you all. *The very day of your marriage* I got a letter informing me that, in consequence of several heavy failures at home and in America, I was totally ruined. What must you think of me? I own I

should have instantly made you acquainted with my circumstances, as I cannot now give poor Eliza a single farthing. I am too old to commence again, and I feel utterly broken-hearted. God knows what will become of me. Though I have deceived you, my poor girl knew nothing about it, so I am sure, as a gentleman, you will treat her well, and be kind to her. I have written to Eliza explaining all.

"Yours most truly,

"C. BULLION.

"P.S.—I will write again in a day or two, when I shall be more equal to it."

The poor girl sobbed bitterly as her husband read this.

"Don't, my dearest Lizzie, take on so," he said. The Major was a gentleman in education and feeling, and he could not bear to see his wife so prostrated by grief. "There, don't fret. I shall write to your father by to-night's post, and look here, Lizzie, the old gentleman shall never want whilst he lives; there, will that content you."

But the poor creature was too heart-

broken even to thank her generous husband for his kindness and liberality, but continued sobbing away.

It soon, as all bad news does, got bruted about that old Bullion was utterly ruined.

Duffer, one morning, over buttered toast and a Yarmouth bloater at breakfast, was told it by his servant.

"No," said he, "is it a fact, Mary?"

"Indeed it is, Sir, more's the pity; he was a kind old gentleman, kind to all, and generous to the poor. No one did more good about here than Mr. Bullion. He was not one of your high quality folks; but he was a good man. The place and all is to be sold as quickly as possible."

Shirkington had no appetite for breakfast; he considered what a narrow escape he had had, and he was in high glee that the Major should have been so taken in; during the day he found out that the report was true, and also where the Major and his bride were staying in London. He considered a bit, and then sat down and wrote the following:—

"The Cottage, Yorkshire, March 15.

"Sir,

"I told you when we last met you should hear from me, and I keep my promise to the letter. Allow me to congratulate you on your marriage, and of having come into possession of such a magnificent dower with your wife. Every one is laughing at the way the knowing Major Rasper has been taken in, and no one more so than

"SHIRKINGTON DUFFER."

The Major, as may be supposed, was not pleased when he received this insulting note.

"I'll horsewhip the cad," he said, "the very first time I meet him, or my name is not Rasper."

"You'll do no such thing, Major. Treat him with contempt. I won't have you getting yourself into messes and trouble, Sir. You promised to take me to the Crystal Palace to-day, so go and get ready."

She could already manage the easy-going Major, and turn him about as she chose,

and he rather liked it than otherwise.

"Well, Lizzie, I'll do as you say, leave the snob alone. It's devilish lucky, though, he is not in "ours" now; by George I'd make it hot for him—there, go and get ready, and we will be off; the days, though lengthening, are not very long yet. We have only a few days more to remain in town, so we must make the most of them."

Their last day was over; on the morrow they were to start for Brighton, where they were to remain a month previous to the Major's joining again.

"I cannot make out how it is, Lizzie, we have not heard from your father; he said he was going to write."

"I am most uneasy about it," she replied. "All alone in his trouble, too, poor dear old man. Oh, you do not know how kind he was to me; my slightest wish was gratified. I was, indeed, a petted and a spoilt child. I was ever in his thoughts; he could not do enough for me—but how changed now."

But whilst she was speaking, and un-

announced, her father walked in. He looked somewhat pale for him, but still in good spirits.

She sprang up to meet him, and flung her arms round him.

"My dear father," she sobbed out, "do not mind it. The Major does not care; neither do I. We have settled it all; you will never want."

"My poor girl," replied the old gentleman, gently disengaging himself, "what am I to say? I hardly know how to look either of you in the face. The Major, I am sure, will never forgive me."

"That I will, Bullion," he said, grasping the old man by the hand. "I will not disguise that it has been a bitter disappointment to me in more ways than one, but it cannot be helped now; do not let us allude to it any more. Whatever may be your difficulties, you shall never want whilst we are alive; that Lizzie and I have settled. There, bring your chair up to the fire, and try the port; it's capital."

The old man did so, and was musing intently.

"Do you mean to say, Rasper," he at length uttered, "that you intend, after my duplicity, to support me?"

"I asked you to say nothing about it," replied his son-in-law; "I want you to have a quiet evening. But as you put it to me, I will answer you, yes. Lizzie and I intend you to have an income that will keep you comfortably. I have eight hundred a-year of my own and my pay! in a few weeks I shall be Colonel, which will give me a further addition; it shall never be said that my wife's father was in want. Now don't say another word."

The old man was still musing; but there was a curious twinkle in his eye as he sat beating his foot on the fender.

"Major Rasper," said he, at last, "you are a gentleman, and a good fellow; and I am only too proud to have you as a son-in-law; your heart is in the right place. I don't think I shall be obliged to take advantage of your generosity and liberality. No, I am not so badly off, after all, and can yet give Eliza her hundred thousand pounds."

"Dear papa, then you are not ruined!" exclaimed his daughter.

"Well, not exactly this time, Eliza. The fact is, it was a false and wicked rumour set about by I don't know who. I was utterly wretched, as you may suppose; but the second morning after you had left, I got letters, papers, notices, and heavens knows what, assuring me nothing was wrong; but I had received too great a fright to get over it quickly, so what do you think I have done? Why, I have retired, disposed of my business to an old friend, and here I am to tell you the good news myself, and that I am many thousands richer than when you last saw me."

The Major gave one ringing "Whoop!" and his wife was laughing and crying by turns on her father's shoulder.

"News! glorious news!" said the excited soldier. "Now, then, I may sell out, Bullion!"

"Yes, and live with me if you choose. I have sold everything in the North. I intend buying a nice place, not too far from London. Live with me, Rasper; don't separate

me from my daughter in my old age; and now that I have nothing to do, the place will be as your own, and yours when I am dead and gone."

So it was settled. The Major was to send in his papers as soon as possible; they were to make out the week in London, and then be off on a house-hunting expedition.

The Major could not resist the temptation of retaliating on Shirkington, and answering his note, which he did next morning.

"Long's Hotel, March 19.

"My poor Duffer,

"Yours received; most kind of you. You know, doubtless, long ere this will reach you, that the rumour of Mr. Bullion's failure was a *canard*. He has settled a hundred thousand on my wife; he is now with us; and in a few days we are off to look for some place which he intends purchasing. We live with him at any rate for a time, and I am going to sell out.

"If you should be in town before we

leave, which will be in five or six days, come and dine with us, and I will give you a receipt for sticking to your pigskin. We are as jolly as sand boys. Is it true Alice Lee is going to be married shortly?

"Yours, old boy,

"F. RASPER."

"There!" exclaimed the Major to himself, "is a rap over the knuckles for him—a Roland for his Oliver. Poor devil, what a rage he will be in about Alice! That was not badly put in."

So saying, he sealed the letter and despatched it.

Long before he received it, Shirkington was aware that Bullion was better off than he had ever been, and his temper was not improved by the news; but when he received the Major's letter he was quite beside himself. He knew how he was laughed at. So, packing up his traps, settling with his landlord, and despatching his two men with his horses, he betook himself off to Brighton. There he sold his screws pretty well, only reserv-

ing the two he had bought from Allsnob.

The Major, his wife, and her father were busy with house-agents, in getting the particulars of those modern places replete with every comfort and elegance, of which so many are for immediate sale; after a month's hunting and looking at no end of houses, the old gentleman pitched on one to his fancy, a very nice place, and which happened to be within a mile or two of Alice Lee's farm.

The old cotton king lost no time in furnishing it in first-rate style. There was Madam's boudoir, and the Major's den, wherein were placed his guns, fishing-rods, pipes, endless cigar-boxes, his sword, sabretach, and some of his barrack furniture, which he would not part with.

Alice Lee knew of their arrival, but in her position she could not put herself forward.

"I am sure," she said, "if the Major should happen to see me he will remember me, and then I shall hear some news of Duffer, who treated me so cruelly. He has been properly served; but after all I

cannot help pitying him. Ah! he will find no one who would have been truer to him than I should."

She still had a hankering after her quondam lover; and, if the truth was known, hardly a day passed but what she thought of him. He little knew how close he was to her, for she was within a dozen miles of Brighton.

Brighton, at the time our friend returned, was exceedingly dull and empty, and there were but few people for him to show off before, and exhibit his winning horsemanship.

"Hang me!" he exclaimed one morning, "if I don't go over and beard the lioness in her den, and pay a visit to Alice. If I could only get on there again; but then she is so devilish proud, and will never forgive me the slight."

He rang the bell to order his horse, when into the room came with his servant no less a person than Mr. Pastern.

"Hallo, Pastern, what the devil brings you here?" he asked. "Left the Colonel?"

"Yes, Sir, yes. Couldn't stand him no

longer; awful temper; always a creeping in to the stable a looking at the old pony and that screw, 'Jim Crow.' No, Sir, a stud-groom's professional pride couldn't stand it nohow, so I give warning." He had been kicked out by the Colonel for getting drunk and abusive. "If you've a job, Sir, for me, or would give me a bit of a character, I should be glad."

"I have my own man," said Duffer, decisively. "And as to a character, why I don't mind giving you a written one. How did you leave them all?"

"They've most all left, Sir. The Colonel and his wife are gone to Cheltenham to live. He would not go back to his old quarters. Mr. Turtlefat and his wife are started for abroad again. My Lord and Lady Verriefast are in London till their yacht comes round to Scarborough. Sir John Forest is going abroad with them, and Mr. Thornhill and all the family are getting ready to go with them as well. Mr. Charles is nearly well again. All the fun was up after the steeple-chases."

"And Mr. Bluster, Pastern, where is he?"

"Oh, he's back at his own place near here; you know it, Sir? I'm told he is at Thorley Farm pretty well every day. They do say he's carrying on wonderful with Miss Lee, Sir; going to be married to her."

"Oh, is he?" said Shirkington, turning excessively red. "Going to be married! when?"

"Well, that I can't say, Sir. I don't know if it's true, but so people say."

This decided Duffer at once; he would be off without further delay, and put Bluster's nose out of joint. "That ass carrying on with Alice! I'll Alice him!" So he dismissed Mr. Pastern with a tip of half-a-crown, and mounted his horse.

"What an infernal ass I have been," he soliloquised. "Why on earth did I throw her up? She would have made me a dear little wife, and I should have been happy and comfortable, instead of leading this infernal life. Dinner always an hour behind time, cold breakfasts, no buttons

on a fellow's shirts; it's horrible! I wonder if she will have anything more to say to me."

He rode along pondering and thinking of the future, till he had ridden some ten miles; then he began to ask for Thorley Farm, and at last came in view of it.

It was situated in a nicely wooded dell, well sheltered by hills. It was not only pretty, but had a thorough air of comfort about it. The garden and lawn looked so nice and well kept, walks well rolled and weeded. It was in every respect a nice pretty little place. There was the farm-yard and buildings well away from the house in the rear, the pigeons flying about in a cloud in the keen air, and the whole place bore the stamp of what it was—a thorough well-to-do English farm.

Shirkington dismounted at the rustic porch and rang the bell. Miss Lee was in; would the gentleman hang his horse on the hook there till one of the men came round and took charge of it? What name should she say? She knew Bluster, for he had been there pretty often already.

"What name? Oh, say an old friend." And he seated himself in one of the comfortable arm-chairs.

"Tip-top this," he thought. "Well-furnished, and in capital taste; it's beautiful. What an ass I've been!"

Alice was more than astonished when she came into the room.

"Shirk— Mr. Duffer, I mean," said the poor girl, turning crimson. "I had no idea it was you."

"No, Alice, I suppose not; thought it was Bluster, eh?"

"I did not think anything about it. May I ask what brings you here?"

"Well, Alice, I've come to see you."

"What, after all your cruel, heartless behaviour to me?"

"Well, well, Alice; let bye-gones be bye-gones. You will not turn me out, will you, after my long ride?"

"No, Mr. Duffer, I will not turn you out." And her eyes filled with tears.

Shirkington thought this a good omen, and tried to take her hand; but she indignantly withdrew it.

"No, Sir," she said, "nothing of that sort, if you please. The day is gone by for that. Will you take anything?"

"Well, yes, I will, Alice. I suppose you have thrown me over for that fellow Bluster?"

"And pray, Mr. Duffer, who did you throw me over for? For one who in her turn threw you over. It is no use denying it; I knew all."

"From that infernal Lady Verriefast?"

"Yes, it was, and I need hardly recall to your memory how you treated her. Upon my word, Shirk—Mr. Duffer, I mean, you are a regular Lothario. Now, if you will take something, do. And you can lunch with me whilst I dine at two o'clock, and I will show you the place which might have been yours."

"But tell me, Alice—Bluster—is he anything to you?"

"I don't know that you have any right to put such a question; but this I say, he is very kind and good-natured; but he is nothing more to me than he was, or is he likely to be."

"But he comes here very often, Alice."

"You would not have me turn him away; but as I cannot see that you have any right to dictate to me, I refuse to answer any further questions."

Duffer saw she was in earnest, so pressed her no further. She took him all over the house, which was most comfortable; but one door she avoided. It was a red-baize one.

"And what room is this, Alice?" he said, touching the baize door with his stick.

"Oh, that is a little sitting-room; a very small one."

Without saying a word he opened the door. There was another red baize one beyond it, which he had to pass through before he entered a beautifully fitted-up little room. There were the red cloth curtains, beautiful easy chairs, in red morocco, with the others to correspond. There was a gun-rack, a rack for pipes, a writing table—it was a complete gentleman's den.

"What a lovely little crib," exclaimed

Duffer. "I never saw anything better done in my life. This was not your uncle's, Alice, for it is all new."

The poor girl burst into tears. "I had it fitted up for you," she sobbed.

Shirkington was going to speak to her, when the servant entered, saying Mr. Bluster was in the drawing-room, but Bluster was no such thing. Bluster had followed the servant, and stood before them.

All three looked remarkably uncomfortable. Alice turned red; Bluster muttered something about "not being aware."

Duffer was the first to speak; he took not the slightest notice of his former friend.

"The room is beautifully fitted up, Alice. Nothing could be better," he said.

That one word "Alice" settled poor Bluster. Whatever hopes he might have had, that one word "Alice" crushed them. He said, "If he addresses her so familiarly, he is all right with her again, and it's no use my persisting;" so after a few minutes

of desultory conversation and every-day remarks, took his departure.

"I remember," thought Shirkington, "how he tried to steal a march on me with Bessie Sprightly. I knocked him out of time then, and I've done it again." So he was highly satisfied with himself.

They went over the farmyards, which were full of stock and poultry; had a look at her pretty pony and carriage, but she did not mention a word about the Reverend Oily Gammone—and she resolved no one should ever know anything about it.

Duffer felt rather low and dispirited. The more he saw of the place, the more he regretted the way in which he had behaved.

Alice, too, was quite different, so quiet and easy, so nicely dressed, aud did the honours of her house so prettily.

At two they sat down to dinner—soup, steak, and a couple of rabbits, which had been killed on the farm, and some good old October ale, of her late uncle's brewing, claret, and a syphon of chalibeate water.

If there was a thing Shirkington liked

more than another it was brown sherry, and after the things had been taken away, and the pretty little dessert set on the table, a bottle was put before Duffer. Alice had often heard him say brown sherry was his wine.

"What is this, Alice, in this jolly old musty-looking bottle? Something precious by your not decanting it." And he helped her and then himself. "Brown sherry, by all that's glorious, and magnificent wine too."

So it was; the poor girl had got six dozen of it for him at fifty-eight shillings the dozen, from a first class London house.

"I'm glad you like it, Mr. Duffer." Her eyes filled with tears as she said this. Shirkington saw it, and forbore to ask any further questions, but after he had swallowed two or three glasses, moved round to the fire. Then she placed the bottle and his glass on the little bracket beside him. He felt wonderfully at his ease in the luxurious arm-chair, and then he opened the proceedings by imploring

Alice to forgive him. He used every endeavour to turn her, but she was firm.

"I should be very sorry, Mr. Duffer," she said, "to be inhospitable, but you must not come here any more; it is perfectly useless. Nothing can change me, neither shall I permit any further visits from Mr. Bluster. I have no wish to be talked about."

"But you will marry some one," he asked, "that would kill me."

"Don't talk nonsense, Mr. Duffer; you are not so easily killed." She little imagined how easy it was to be done.

Shirkington, seeing that no impression was to be made, thought it would be the wisest plan not to press her any further, at least, at present, so he sat sipping his wine.

The clock ticked on the mantel-piece, and they sat opposite each other without speaking. At last he arose, saying, "Well, Alice, it serves me right, but I will never marry any other woman but you. Now I must go. You will let me come and see you now and then, not often, you know, but occasionally."

"Far better you did not, Sir; but you may come if you like now and then."

Shirkington had his horse brought round, and rode slowly away. There was a something came over him he could not account for; he felt sad, and a foreboding of evil oppressed him. He regretted leaving Alice and the pretty little place. And as he turned in his saddle saw her standing at the rustic porch, watching his departure.

The poor girl's heart ached as she watched his receding figure, but he had wounded her pride that she felt she could not forgive him. "I could have been happy with him; I think I could have altered him," she murmured, and she took one last look at him before entering her house. As she did so she gave a piercing shriek, for she saw Duffer's horse shy at something white that ran across the path, rear up, and throw him heavily.

She ran screaming along the road, followed by one of her maid-servants; but before she could reach him a labouring lad run up.

"What is it, John?" she breathlessly exclaimed, and turning deadly pale as she looked at the pool of blood which was welling from his temple. "Is he dead?"

"Yes, Maissis, I am afraid he is."

CHAPTER IV.

"A LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVE."

About the middle of May, one fine evening, a slashing fore and aft schooner, carrying a nice breeze with her, sailed into the Bay of Naples and dropped anchor. At her mast head she flew the Burgee of the Royal Yacht Squadron, and at her taffrail the white ensign floated.

It took but a short time before the sails were cased, the awning over the quarter-deck put up, and all made snug for the night.

Few people are aware of the comforts of a large and well-kept English yacht. It is not here you will have a greasy underdone mess coming from the forecastle fire, which is called dinner, or great thick junks

of bread which have been held before the stove for a few moments, and then by courtesy called toast, or an odour of burnt fat pervading the whole ship. Lord Verriefast did not manage things in this way. He had a French *chef*, with his assistant; there was his captain, his sailing master, first and second mate, boatswain, steward, second steward, and a full complement of hands, who kept regular watch, as in Her Majesty's service. He had also a band of eight on board—not any of your common street musicians, but men who could play, and were not lying in their berths half the time suffering from sea-sickness.

No yacht, out of the hundreds we have, was better done than Lord Verriefast's. The decks were washed and holystoned every morning, and the handsome and elegant vessel was as trim and well cared for as a man-of-war. She had touched at Cadiz and the Rock for fresh provisions, and a few luxuries only to be got at those places.

They had plenty of books on board, a

piano—cards, and rang the changes with an occasional hit at backgammon, draughts or chess. Whilst the two ladies played at besique, the gentlemen had their game of whist.

The inevitable authorities had been on board and departed, and the schooner lay at anchor as quiet as a sleeping infant. The breeze had gone down, and the gentle ripple could scarcely be heard against the sides of the 'Firefly.'

"What a glorious sky!" exclaimed Sir John, looking up at it. The shades of coming night had already began to cast their shadows. "Ah, there goes sunset," as the brass four-pounder on the forecastle boomed out, and down came the bunting at the same instant. "Something like a climate this, Verriefast," he continued, "it is a pity our own sea-girt little island does not boast of such."

"Yes," returned his Lordship, "and yet we should be lost here after a bit. Where is there such hunting as in England, to say nothing of the shooting and fishing; here they pass away their lives in a

dreamy sort of listlessness which would soon be my death. I once took a villa at Florence for six months, and nearly cut my throat with *ennui* after six weeks."

"Oh, but this is beautiful, very beautiful, George," said his wife, linking her arm affectionately into his. "Englishmen think of nothing but hunting and shooting in the winter, and cricket, golf, fishing and racing in the summer."

"And I think," retorted his Lordship, "that some ladies like hunting in the season, and flower shows, archery, croquet, picnics and so on, as well as race meetings. I was thinking of taking you, in the autumn, to Goodwood for the week; we have an invite, but—"

"You silly fellow," interrupted his wife, "don't talk nonsense; of course we will go. Here is Williamson with the cigars and grog. Now you gentlemen will be happy."

It was a lovely night, and all were on deck. Charlie was looking quite himself again. He had picked up wonderfully during his voyage. Both he, his uncle,

Lord Verriefast, and Sir John were smoking. Lady Verriefast and Mary were seated in low lounging chairs, as were all the rest.

"This yachting puts me in mind of my late stock-broker," said Sir John, "he died, leaving his son well off. Nothing would suit this gentleman but he must have a yacht. I'll tell you all about it Lady Verriefast and Mary, if you like."

"Oh do, Sir John!" exclaimed both.

"Very well, listen to this," said the Baronet.

"Going through a regular course of sporting, are you? It will be a regular course of physic, for you don't know anything about it. This comes of young men having unlimited control of a large quantity of ready money."

"But, uncle, a fellar must have a beginning, you know, at everything.

"So they must, Harry; but not to commence with everything at once, though. What do you mean by a regular course of sporting?"

"Well, uncle," replied Mr. Harry Sim-

pleman, "yachting, fishing, shooting, hunting"—

"And I suppose racing," interrupted his uncle.

"Well, no; I don't think I shall go into racing, I'm hardly up to that form. I may make an occasional bet or two, but nothing more."

"Look here, Harry," said the old gentleman; "of course I know you will have your way, and I'm not going even to try and prevent you. Your poor father, my brother, was a stock-broker—so am I—you, by his death, come into a couple of thousand a-year, and three or four thousands of ready money; why don't you go and live quietly at your pretty little place in Berkshire? There you can have your horses, shooting, boating, and hunting; but now from what I have heard you want a yacht, and to cruise down the Mediterranean. Well do so, if you like; but hire one; you'll be deuced glad to give it up before you have had it a month. Then, as to fishing, your idea is Norway. Now, what do you know about salmon and fly

fishing? You are all very well in a Thames punt for roach and gudgeon; give up Norway, at any rate. Then, as to shooting, a moor in Scotland is your mark; what do you know of dogs, or shooting?—nothing. You have popped at a few finches on Barnes Common, but you have never taken a heavy day's walking in your life, so give up Scotland, and take a bit of shooting near your own place. Leicestershire, I suppose, is your idea of a hunting quarter, Melton Mowbray, for instance; even if you could ride to hounds, you would want ten or twelve horses there. With what you propose to do, you would require at least twenty thousand a-year; luckily, my boy, save this loose cash, all your property is tied up, and you can't play ducks and drakes with it. You are just thirty; and a man of your age cannot learn to do all these things, take to one or two; suppose you go in for fishing and shooting —hunting, absurd! You can ride along a road in a fashion, but not across country. Think it over, Harry. Now I must be off."

Harry did think of it, and determined to hire a yacht, at any rate for a month. It was now April, so he had lots of time to think about shooting, fishing, &c.

The first thing was to get a captain who could put him in the way. This the secretary of a yacht club soon did. Captain Wideawake, late of the 'Sea Foam,' was the captain and sailing-master recommended.

Captain Richard Wideawake was a good man, though relatively a very little one; five feet in his sea boots was all he could measure, though what he wanted in height he made up in breath. He was about fifty years of age, grizzly hair—what there was of it—somewhat red in feature; but his nose—it was a nose! a large bulbous-looking one, with a beautiful mulberry-coloured tip.

Captain Wideawake was a great man with the yacht agents. Many an old rotten tub had he stuck the unwary with, always receiving a percentage on the sale; it was a pleasure to hear him debate on the sailing qualities of a vessel.

"Seaworthy, did you say, Sir? I should just say she was. I knowed that wessel, Sir, ever since she was built; tight as a bottle, and sweet as a nut; my eye but she can go! I never see such a wessel close-hauled in my life; a little free of helm, but comes about like a top; you should see her in stays, and as handy as can be; the sails, I'll allow, are a bit mildewed; but what of that? They set like a board; Lapthorn cut 'em. She's a trimmer in a topsail breeze—that's what she is, and no mistake—talk of the Flying Cloud, dear heart alive! she's a good 'un in a calm; but this ere one would double Cape Horn with every stitch set, an' ne'e'r a reef in."

Such was the style of the Captain introduced to Mr. Simpleman, as one who could find him a good boat, and take command of her at the moderate rate of three guineas a-week and all found.

"Want to hire a wessel, do you, Sir? Werry proud, I'm sure, to give you the benefit of my experience. What might you be going to do, Sir—race or cruise?"

"Oh, to cruise down the Mediterranean," replied the victim.

"You'll be wanting a goodish-sized boat, then. Nice fore and aft schooner, Sir, about a hundred and twenty ton or thereabouts. You're member of some club, in course?"

"No, Captain, I cannot say I am."

"Well, but you must be, Sir. Why, it would cost you a fortin in harbour dues. No difficulty in getting you into the Windy-Weather Club."

This was a famous club, none of its members ever went out in a six-knot breeze; they preferred laying at anchor when it was at all rough, and when it was fine they gave luncheons on board; were great in claret cups, flags and burgees; wore blue serge clothes, with a profusion of buttons, and knowing straw hats; and when their boats did go for a race, took very good care not to be on board, but watched it from the deck of a steamer, or the roof of their club-house.

"Well, I'm sure, Captain Wideawake, I

hardly know what sized boat I ought to have."

"Well, Sir, nothing under a hundred ton, then you get comfort. Let's see, ye'll want a captain, a steward, steward's boy, cook, and cook's boy, that's five, mate, and nine hands, fifteen in all; fifteen in all, little enough; but as I should not like to see you imposed on, or put to useless expense, I'll manage it for you. Well, Sir, I knows a wessel that will just suit; if you will let me arrange it, all will be ready in a fortnight."

"Very well, Captain, then do so, and get her ready as soon as possible."

A boat was soon procured; as Simpleman had stated he was going cruising, Wideawake got hold of an old tub just suited for that. He liked comforts and a roomy vessel.

"Drat them narrer coffins! I can't abide 'em. Give me a wessel with a good floor and plenty of beam; not one of those wedges, as is always wet and drowning of a feller; I likes 'em full above the water-line, and bluff at the bow; them's the sort of boats for comfort," said Captain Wideawake.

It is needless to say he received a pretty good douceur for getting a victim for the old 'Sea Wave.' As she was found, Simpleman had nothing to buy except stores, but the Captain insisted on a piano for the state cabin.

"You'll be 'aving young ladies on board, in course, Sir, to dine and lunch, and to see the regattas; the saloon would be nothink without a pianer."

So a piano was got.

Behold Simpleman now on board his yacht, dressed in the correct and modern yachting costume, made of blue serge, with the club buttons, a glass slung across his shoulders, white canvas shoes, and straw hat; all his men with the 'Sea Wave' embroidered on their guernsies. In fact, Wideawake had done the thing correctly. It certainly cost a little money, as Simpleman's cheque-book testified. What of that, all amusements cost money.

Harry was not in a particularly good humour the morning after he had slept on board; his face looked as if it was going to break out with small pox.

"Captain," he called out, as that individual made his appearance up the companion, "I don't know what to do. I cannot stand another night in this infernal vessel. I'm bitten all to pieces—eaten up—look at my face."

"Well, Sir, there is no denying as them B flats has been at you. All wessels has 'em."

"But all my toes, Wideawake; sea air does not agree with me. All my toes are so sore I can hardly put my feet to the ground. I never was in such a state in my life."

"That's them cussed cock-roaches. Never you mind, Sir; we'll settle all them. That's the worst of not having a new wessel; but there's plenty of parafin oil aboard. Just you well rub yourself all over with it, Sir, afore you goes to bed, and you won't be troubled any more with them jokers."

"By George! you don't mean to say I must rub myself all over with that nasty stuff. Why, I shall smell like a lamp."

"What's the odds of that, Sir? It will

all come off when you takes your tub in the morning. You'll get used to it in a couple of days. Anyways it's the only plan to keep 'em away."

Harry had a cruise or two down to the Nab and back. He was almost afraid as yet to go round the Wight; he feared the state of his stomach and the activity of his sea-legs, and as yet had not given a thought of the Mediterranean. A walk on Ryde pier to see the youth and beauty, suited him far better, and he began to think that after all yachting was not such an enchanting amusement, and very costly. He liked his money, and he did not, as the term goes, part freely. The weekly wages were something frightful.

Harry Simpleman did not sleep much on board now; he had taken a bedroom at Ryde, but spent his days and dined on board. One morning he saw many of the yachts slipping their moorings, so he determined to do the same, and gave orders for it. This did not suit Wide-awake, for he was going to have a little party on board that evening—a few jovial

and kindred spirits to pass the time. "Going a sailing, are you, this morning? There's a stiffish breeze a coming up, Sir; but, never mind. Where might you be going to?"

"I'm going to follow the other yachts, Wideawake."

"They're bound round the Wight, Sir."

"Very well, so am I."

"All right, Sir. Here," to the mate, "all hands up to set sail; uncase the mainsail and foresail. Oh, my noble joker," he muttered to himself. "See if I don't give you pepper to-day, to go and interfere with a gentleman's comfort in this way, just as I had engaged my friends too for this evening. You're always a doing of it, you agriwating snob you. I say, Jones," to the mate, "let her have it, the full of it, when we gets clear. Our little game's knocked on the head else for this evening. Clap every rag on."

The order was carried out, and away bowled the 'Sea Wave.' Harry walked the deck humming, "I'm afloat;" "The admiral;" "A life on the ocean wave,"

and so on; but presently the humming ceased, and he called for a glass of brandy and water; he got, too, somewhat paler in the face.

"Captain," he exclaimed, at length, "is it not getting very rough?"

"Rough, Sir? Smooth as a mill-pond; a glorious seven knot breeze; go round the Wight in no time, Sir. Keep her full, Jones."

"Aye, aye, Sir." And the old boat went dashing along.

"If it's not rough now, I wonder what the deuce it's like when it is?" mentally asked the victim.

"It's no use, Wideawake, I can't stand it any longer. I'm getting beastly ill," gasped poor Harry, and he rushed to the side.

"Oh, it's nothing at all, Sir. You'll get over it in an hour or so; stomach out of order. There's a nice little bit of biled pork, greens, and taters, as will be ready for the men's dinners in five minutes, Sir. Have a bit; put you all to rights."

"Oh, hang it, Wideawake, don't, for

heaven's sake, talk of eating; the very thought of it makes me ill. There I go again," and he rushed to the side.

"Ready about," called out the captain, and the old boat's head flew up to wind.

"Let draw," shouted the man at the helm, when he found he had got her, and the Sea Wave's head was pointed towards Ryde again. When she got up to her moorings, Simpleman was not long in going ashore, and it was evening before he was well enough to take his stroll on the pier.

His yacht was not laying far off the pier head, so he sat himself down looking at it, thinking that he had better have taken his uncle's advice, and left it alone. However, he was determined to give it up at the end of the month; that day's sail had thoroughly sickened him.

"A fine spree they're having on board the 'Sea Wave' this evening," exclaimed one waterman to another.

"Are they?" exclaimed his companion. "They're always having sprees there, directly their governor goes on shore. They liquors up wonderful."

"Who has got the old cockroach trap now?" asked the first.

"Blessed if I know," returned the other. "Some London chap, as knows nothing about it, or he'd soon put a stop to these games."

Simpleman waited to hear no more, but strolled slowly back, and further down engaged a boat to take him to his vessel. It was just dark when he reached it; the gangway was down, so he stepped quietly on board, and descended to the state cabin.

The captain sat with his back to him. Opposite him sat another of the same kidney, and three or four on each side. Each had one of Harry's choice Regalias in his mouth, and three or four bottles of his particular dry champagne were empty on the table.

The gentlemen had evidently dined, for their countenances were inflamed and fiery.

"Now, captain, give us a stave," demanded the vice-chair; "a stunner, with a chorus.

"I object," said Harry, stepping briskly

into the cabin. "What is the meaning of all this, Wideawake?"

"It means, Sir," said that individual, slowly turning round and confronting his master, "it means that I and my friends, sea-captains who has viaged round the world with me, is enjying ourselves."

"So I see," replied Harry, "with my wine and my cigars too," and going on deck and sending a couple of the men on shore for policemen, Captain Wideawake, the steward, and the cook presently found themselves in durance vile. The next morning the men were paid off. The agent came on board, and took possession of the boat, and that evening it was announced in the local papers "that the well-known 'Sea Wave' fully found and ready for sea, was to be let or sold."

This thoroughly sickened Master Harry of yachting. He took his uncle's advice, and stuck to his little place in Berkshire; had a boat, a punt, and a nice little steam launch on the Thames; got a little rough shooting, enough to amuse him, and a steady cob. He finished by running away

with a deuced pretty girl from a boarding school, who had eight thousand pounds of her own; so he did not do badly. He is happy as the days are long, and as steady as old time; fond of his wife, who insists on his going out in her handsome carriage and pair every fine day.

"What a lot of Simplemans there are," continued Sir John, "those two young men, Duffer and Bluster, always put me in mind of Harry Simpleman. I only hope they will get off as well as he did. Steward," catching sight of that individual, "I will take another glass of whiskey and water, and not quite so stiff as the last."

Lord Verriefast looked at his wife and laughed, as Sir John mentioned Duffer's name; but it was too dark to see the slight blush that rose on her cheek, but she thought how much better off she was, and how much happier than she could ever have been with him.

They soon after this went below, for although the weather was splendid, it was still a little chilly at night.

The next morning they went on shore, and had hardly set foot on Italian ground when they met John Turtlefat and his beautiful wife, accompanied by a handsome black-bearded and moustachioed man, who was introduced to them as Count Orloff.

Although nature had been bountiful to the Count in the way of fortune, figure and good looks, there was a something that failed to please a close observer, and an indefinable disagreeable expression; yet no one could say that the Russian Count was not a handsome and distingué-looking man. He was faultlessly dressed, and spoke English well.

He bowed low and showed his white teeth as he was introduced to Lady Verriefast and Mary Thornhill. The gentlemen he looked somewhat superciliously at. As for Charlie, he took an instinctive dislike to him at once, he looked at him hard for some time when he thought he was not observed, and fell into a fit of musing.

"I shall be very pleased," said the

Count, "to show you all that is to be seen. That is your yacht, I suppose, in the bay. A very fine vessel, Milady and Mademoiselle are good sailors, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, Count, we are capital sailors," they replied, "we enjoy our trip immensely."

An invitation was given to John Turtlefat and his wife to lunch on board, and as the Count could not be very well left out, he was included with the others.

They were a merry party on board. Sir John was glad to see Turtlefat and his wife on such good terms with each other, and that he had been the means of bringing them together.

"How long, Turtlefat, have you known the Count?" asked the Baronet of him.

"Oh, nearly a month. He is a very nice fellow; I like him amazingly. I have asked him to return with us to England, there is nothing of that going on now, but he will amuse himself somehow. He says he hunts and shoots."

"Oh, indeed; does he play?"

"Well I don't know, Sir John, whether

he plays or not. He once asked me if I did, and proposed écarté; but as I never play cards, no more was said about it."

The Count was very attentive to the ladies—to Mary especially. He evidently admired her brilliant beauty.

"Are you to remain here long?" he asked her.

"Oh no, Count, we never stay long in any place; we are cruising, you know—birds of passage. It is more for the sake of my cousin's health than anything else. Lord Verriefast is so kind."

"Your cousin, Mademoiselle; which is your cousin?"

"The gentleman who is sitting on the lee side in that easy chair," she had got quite nautical in her language, "he had a bad accident some months ago; he was shot."

"Oh, indeed, in a duel?"

"Oh, dear no, Count, we are not guilty of such foolish things in England; it is against the law. No, it was at battue shooting. It was an accident."

The Russian fixed his glass in his eye,

and took a deliberate stare at the young man, who was quitely smoking his cigar.

"Yes, Mademoiselle, he is passable, but I suppose I must say to you he is very handsome."

"It does not much matter, Count, what anyone says. We all think him very handsome," and she moved towards her father.

The Count bit his lip, and crossed over to Mrs. Turtlefat.

"So the gentleman there," he said, nodding his head towards where Charlie Thornhill was sitting, "is Mademoiselle's cousin."

"Yes, Count, is he not handsome? and he is so nice."

"Well, I really cannot see anything handsome in him; but Mademoiselle is exceedingly beautiful."

"Yes, Count, one of the most beautiful creatures I ever saw, and as good as she is beautiful. She will be enormously rich one of these days; but you must say nothing against Charlie Thornhill to her, nor, indeed, to any of us; she is shortly to be married to him."

The Count gave a little start as she said this, but took no further notice.

Shortly after this the Turtlefats took their leave, arranging they should all go and picnic somewhere next day.

"How do you like the Russian, Charlie?" asked Sir John.

"Not a bit," returned the other. "A presuming self-sufficient ass; but I'll take the wind out of his sails before long."

This the Baronet felt assured he would do, and this was the reason that he, Lord Verriefast, and old Mr. Thornhill had a long and earnest confab after Charlie was asleep and dreaming.

The first thing that had to be done in the morning was to hire carriages, but that had been left to John Turtlefat.

The steward had orders from Lord Verriefast to put up what was necessary, and by ten all was in readiness, and they were soon on shore, where Turtlefat and his wife were waiting for them. The Count had not arrived, so Charlie managed that himself, Mary, Mrs. Turtlefat, and Lord Verriefast occupied one carriage, and Lady

Verriefast, Sir John, and Mr. Thornhill and the Count the other. But the Count had not arrived, and they were anxious to be off. The baskets and other things had all been safely stowed away, still no Count, and Charlie began fondly to imagine he was not coming. They were all in their carriages waiting.

"Five minutes more," said his Lordship, "and then we go."

But before the five minutes the Count appeared, cantering his blood bay quietly along, followed by a servant in livery.

"We were just off, Count, without you!" exclaimed Lord Verriefast. "Give your horse to your man, and jump up in the next carriage."

The Count, though he took his place, was evidently not pleased at the arrangement. He wanted to show off his horsemanship a little before they started.

"I so wanted you to look at my horses, my Lady," he said.

"Seen quite enough of them, Count; they're not up to your weight, or near it!" shouted his Lordship. "Charlie Thornhill, here, would tell you to a pound what would

suit you. You should see the fellow ride; finest horseman in Europe."

He took a delight in "hitting the Count," as he called it. But there was no further time for badinage, for they were off.

"I am quite certain," said Charlie, as they went along, "that I have seen the Count before, and to-day I'll prove it."

They had glorious weather, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves; the wet blanket was the Count; he paid the greatest attention to Mary, who was tormented to death by him; and Sir John Forest saw that sooner or later there would be a rupture between Charlie and the Russian.

The gentlemen were lying on the grass, after dinner, smoking, and the three ladies had gone for a stroll by themselves.

The Russian was praising the 'Firefly' and English yachts, when Charlie said, "I'll tell you a funny thing that happened about a yacht:—

"Some four or five years ago a gentleman hired for three months a fine boat of a hundred and twenty tons, from a well-

known builder, at a hundred a-month. He cruised about the Wight, gave parties, picnics and what not on board; he went the pace so hard that he presently got into difficulties. One morning he was just starting for a sail, when a boat pulled alongside, and a couple of men came on board; they were bailiffs to seize the vessel, which, it appeared, they had an idea, belonged to this gentleman, so they made an arrest.

"'Very well, gentlemen,' said the yachtsman, 'we will sail her into Cowes, for I can't pay,' and he gave a few orders to his captain, who was as rollicking a fellow as I ever saw. 'Come below,' he said, turning to the two men, 'and we will have a glass of champagne; it's the last drink, I suppose, I shall have on board.'

"'Oh, I daresay it will be all arranged in a few days,' said one of them, as they followed him below.

"There they had a bottle of champagne, and another; but they were too wary to take much. He tried hard to get them to partake of a third, but to no purpose.

"'I suppose, Sir,' said one of them, 'we

shall soon be in Cowes, she seems going along ?'

"'Steward,' called out the gentleman, 'how far are we off Cowes ?'

"'Make it in another twenty minutes, Sir,' replied the man. 'The wind is freshening.'

This was palpable to all, for the vessel began to jump and roll a bit.

At last the two men would remain below no longer, and went on deck, followed by the other.

"'Why, by Heavens, we're abreast of the Needles !' they exclaimed.

"And so it was; the vessel was wide of them, though, and tearing along with every rag set.

"'Ha, ha !' laughed their entertainer; 'you came to arrest the vessel, my fine fellows. Now I am going to take you for a little cruise for the benefit of your healths.'

"It was in vain they threatened and protested; no one would listen to them. The sailors enjoyed the joke amazingly. Well, it ended the next day in their being

put in their own boat, about a mile from the French coast, on the Brittany shore; and the vessel sailed off, leaving them to find their way home as well as they could, which they did about a week after.

"In a short time the vessel returned to Cowes one night, and was given up to the owners all right; the captain and sailors took themselves off quietly, and no more was heard of the matter. This gentleman that hired the vessel, Count, was a countryman of yours; he has never been heard of since."

"Ah, indeed, Mr. Thornhill!" exclaimed the Russian, laughing and showing his brilliant teeth. "Very good indeed, and exceedingly well told."

"Capital," said the other gentlemen. "A clever fellow that countryman of yours, Count."

"Very," replied the Russian, somewhat dryly.

They rode back in the same order as they came, very much to the dissatisfaction of the Count, who said it was not fair that Mr. Thornhill was monopolizing the

ladies. But Charlie was resolute, and not to be done.

On arriving at their destination, and waiting for the boat to convey them on board, the Russian took the opportunity of touching Charlie on the arm, saying, "I wish a word with you, Monsieur Thornhill."

Quietly as it had been done, the quick eye of Sir John Forest noticed it.

"A word with me, Count? certainly." And they walked a little way apart.

"I see, Monsieur Thornhill, you know me, as you amused yourself by relating my escapade about the yacht, which happened some years ago."

"Yes, Count, I do know you; I know a good deal about you."

"Well perhaps, Mr. Thornhill, you will not refuse me a little gratification?"

"What is it, Count?" said the young man, sternly.

"To let me have a shot at you to-morrow morning. Two kilometres from here, on the road we went to-day. I will bring a friend; pistols of course."

"Certainly, Count, I will accommodate you; but perhaps you will condescend to tell me why you fasten this quarrel on me?"

"What made you tell the story of the yacht, Sir?"

"Because I saw you trying to flirt and engage the whole attention of the young lady you know I am engaged to. Is that honourable?"

"Everything, Sir, is honourable, as you say in England, in love or war. I intend to propose to Miss Thornhill."

"Do you, Count? then by the living God, if you do, I'll give you the best thrashing you ever had, and one you shall never forget! But you won't have the chance, for I shall acquaint my friends with your intention."

"And quite right too, Charlie," said Sir John, who had stolen on them unperceived. "You were so deeply engaged that you did not hear me coming. Go back, Charlie, to your friends; you know you may leave this affair in my hands."

"Now, Count," said the Baronet, as Charlie turned away, "a word with you, if

you please. You have thought proper to call my young friend out, and for what?"

"Because, Sir John, I did not consider it honourable his telling the story of the yacht."

"Then you think, Count, you have a right to annoy him by paying unmistakeable attentions to a young lady you know he is engaged to. You talk of honour!" continued the angry Baronet, and striding close up to him. "You talk of honour, do you know this?" and he held a letter close to him.

The Russian flushed to the very temples, as he read the address.

"You talk of honour," sneered the Baronet. "You think it honourable, going as you do, to Mr. Turtlefat's house, trying to seduce his wife from him. Do you call writing such a letter as this the act of a gentleman? No, Sir! Mr. Thornhill shall not meet you; and I advise you to go no more to Mr. Turtlefat's house; his wife placed this note in my hand directly after you gave it to her to-day, and asked my advice. You may

call there, but you will not be admitted, that you may be sure of. Take yourself out of the neighbourhood as quickly as you can, or, by the living Harry, I'll make it too hot for you!"

CHAPTER V.

ON THE SICK LIST.

SHIRKINGTON DUFFER was carried to Alice's house perfectly senseless, with a gaping wound in his temple. The poor fellow looked a ghastly object as he lay on a bed, motionless and blood-stained.

"Oh, Doctor," she exclaimed, as the village practitioner entered hastily, "do you think he will die?"

"My dear lady, it is impossible to say till I see what the nature of the injuries are. You had better leave the room now, and I will come down and inform you presently."

The poor girl sat in her little parlour, waiting anxiously for his promised appearance.

At last he came.

"Doctor," she asked, "is there any hope?"

"I am afraid to say. He has a broken arm, leg, and collar-bone. I have sent to Brighton for another medical man. I do not like to be alone in such a serious case. If he has any friends, they had better be telegraphed to immediately. Do you know where he resided?"

"At Brighton, Doctor, but where I do not know."

"Well, we must look in his pockets, and see if there is any address there; if not, we can easily find out. You can come up with me, Miss Lee; we have him in bed. Though it is a bad case, there is always hope, if it be ever so small."

Poor Duffer's address was found, and the next morning all his things, his horses and servants had arrived at Thorley Farm. Alice had done this, for when she saw the state he was in, her woman's heart relented.

"If I had not sent him off," she soliloquised, "it would not have happened. He might have gone an hour later, and

the pigs would have been in the yard. If he dies, I can never forgive myself."

Wearily did the time pass. Yet the true-hearted woman never left his room. There, with one of her maid-servants, did she sit the live-long night.

The doctors came, bringing with them a professional nurse, who took her place at once.

They seemed to Alice to be in his room an age; she walked about from room to room, nervous and excited. At last they came down-stairs.

"No hope I see," she uttered, as she noticed their serious faces.

"We don't say that," said the elder of the two, "he is young and healthy; the broken limbs are set, as well as his collar-bone. If there is no internal injury, he may pull through."

"I pray to God he may," said the poor girl. "Every attention shall be paid him. Do you think he will come to his senses?"

"It is impossible to say at present. My dear young lady, you must have patience."

"I will," she said, "but oh, it is a fearful accident."

"All that can be done, young lady, will," replied the Brighton doctor. He was a man of great reputation. "I shall see him again to-night, but my *confrère* will look in again about one o'clock this afternoon. Now, you must not worry yourself, but hope for the best," and they left her.

The poor thing was in and out of his room, watching him, and asking endless questions of the nurse.

She would go into the stable and see if his horses were comfortable, and then to his bedside.

The day had passed slowly and wearily away. The Brighton doctor had come and gone. Nearly thirty hours had elapsed; still no change. The agony of suspense was becoming insupportable. She could settle to nothing. About midnight, as she was watching alone, for the nurse had left the room for a minute, she saw his pale lips move, and he uttered, "Water."

The drink that had been made, should

he require it, was instantly at his lips. Then he began babbling in an incoherent way, but maimed and bruised as he was, he could not move.

Then he fell into a doze again. She sat, never moving, looking at him. Though, however unworthy he was, she loved with all her woman's heart.

She would have given all she possessed, aye, ten times more, to have recalled him to health and happiness; but there he lay a maimed mass before her, hovering between life and death.

"Oh, Shirk," she uttered, "how happy we might have been." She never thought, poor soul, how badly he had behaved to her; all that was now forgotten and past, and her whole thoughts given to his recovery.

The clock ticked on with its low, monotonous and never varying sound. The night-light, in a saucer of water, shed its feeble rays about, just giving light enough to make everything look dark and ghostly. The fire alone burnt bright and looked cheerful.

"Nurse," exclaimed Alice, as the woman entered, "he has spoken."

"No, Miss, has he?"

"Yes, he asked for water."

The woman approached the bed, and looked long and anxiously at his face, and shook her head.

"He is as bad, Miss, as bad as he can be, but you had better go to bed; this is the second night you are up."

"No, nurse, I shall not go to bed; I could not sleep if I did. You take the arm-chair. I shall remain here."

All night long did the brave, undaunted girl remain by his bedside. Towards morning he began muttering and babbling in an incoherent manner, again asking for water.

As it grew lighter he spoke more, even opened his eyes, and looked about.

"Shirk, dear Shirk!" don't you know me?" as she saw him staring vacantly about. "Don't you know me—Alice Lee? you have been very ill, but you will, thank God, soon be better."

He seemed puzzled, and evidently did

not realise his situation. At last a faint smile crossed his face, and he said, "I want a lawyer."

"Dear Shirk, don't think of lawyers at this time; do you feel any pain?" but the only answer she could get was, "A lawyer."

"You had better send for Mr. Langley at once, Miss," said the nurse. "Do not thwart him."

"Dear Shirk," said the fond woman, leaning over him, "you shall have a lawyer; I have sent for one." He smiled faintly again, and then dozed off.

An hour or more went by. The man of law was there, and waiting for the waking of poor Shirkington Duffer whom we have carried through so many scenes.

At last he awoke, calm, and perfectly conscious.

Alice was at his side on the instant. "Shirk," she said, "the gentleman whom you wish is here—the lawyer."

"Thank you, Alice," he gently replied, "leave me with him a little."

"Now, Sir," he commenced, "my time

is short. I wish you to draw up my will as quickly as possible, and to condense it into as small a space as may be. I leave everything I have in the world to Alice Lee, the mistress of this house. My horses and effects are to be disposed of, except such as she may wish to keep. I ask to be buried in the village, and that she will put up a tomb-stone to my memory. That is all I have to say. Do it as quickly as you can."

Shirkington's wishes were soon put on paper, and it was read over to him.

"That is what you wish, Mr. Duffer," asked the lawyer, "is it not?"

"Quite so, Sir," replied the poor fellow. "Now let it be witnessed by the doctors." They had just entered the room, and before them he signed it, and they affixed their signatures as well. This done, the will was delivered to him.

"I feel easier in my mind, gentlemen, now this is finished. I cannot expect to recover, and I have given all to her who deserves it most. Tell Alice I wish to see her."

The unhappy girl entered presently, pale and trembling.

"My poor, dear fellow, what is it?" she asked.

"Alice, dear Alice, will you do me one last favour," he demanded.

"Yes," she replied, "anything that you ask."

"Alice, marry me before I die. I shall die happier. I must go; I know it. I am very young, but so it must be; forgive me all, and be my wife."

The poor creature threw herself, in an agony of grief, on her knees beside his bed. Even the medical men, who were accustomed to such scenes, were affected.

That evening the clergyman of the village made them man and wife, and she remained that live-long night beside her husband, his hand in hers, without moving.

In vain did her servants and the nurse beg her to go to rest—that she should be called if any change took place. She would not move, and, save a cup of tea

which was brought to her, naught else passed her lips.

Morning found her in the same position, but deadly pale.

The doctors came as usual, and to the questions put them, said there was no difference. "But," remarked the Brighton practitioner, "the longer he lasts, the more hope we have. There is a possibility of his pulling through."

Those few words put fresh life into her. She was another creature; hope was in her heart, and she became comparatively happy.

Towards the afternoon Bluster arrived. He had heard of the accident, and with him came Pastern; but not a word of her marriage did she utter.

"I cannot tell you, Miss Lee," said the honest-hearted Bluster, "how dreadfully shocked I am at this poor fellow's accident. Although latterly we were not on friendly terms, I bear no malice, and should be only too glad to shake hands with him again in health. Do you think I may see him?"

"Although, mum, I ain't his servant now," exclaimed the ex-groom, with tears in his eyes, "I can't forget old times. He 'ad his faults, like other men, and some bad ones too; but he wasn't a regular bad 'un. He came into money too quick, he did, afore he was properly bitted and weighted. Young 'uns will be young 'uns, always kicking over the traces; he'd a come of all that, though, in time. If not too bold, I should like to see him too."

"I do not know, Pastern, that either you or Mr. Bluster can see him; but I will go and find out," and she had a consultation with the nurse.

"Shirk, dear," she asked, leaning over him, "your old friend Mr. Bluster, with Pastern, are below. They have come to inquire after you. Would you like to see them?"

"Yes, Alice; very much. Let them come up."

They were both terribly shocked to find him in such a state. He held out his one poor hand, and attempted to speak; but Bluster stopped him.

"Don't talk, Shirkington," he said, "I'll do that. I am deuced sorry to see you like this; but you will pull through, old chap. I came over directly I heard of it. You have a kind and gentle nurse to look after you in Alice, and you have good medical men. Cheer up, old fellow, you will pull through."

"I hardly think it, Bluster; but it is very kind of you to come. My wife told me you and Pastern wished to see me."

"Poor fellow," said Bluster, "he is wandering." He said this in a gentle voice; but, gentle as it was, Shirkington heard it.

"No wandering at all, Bluster; Alice is my wife."

"Good gracious! I am more than astonished. Well, all I can say is, I am very glad, Duffer. I won't ask anything about it now; I shall hear it all in good time. Anything I can do for you, old fellow, I will, and so will Pastern."

"Yes, Sir, for my old governor," exclaimed the ex-groom, "dashed if I

wouldn't run to London, if he wanted me. I can't abear to see him like this."

"Well Shirk, old boy, we must not remain any longer; God bless you," said Bluster, "I will come over again to-morrow and see you."

"Do you think, Mr. Bluster," asked Alice, "he will get over it?"

"He is very bad, Alice—Mrs. Duffer, I mean; but he is young and strong. Yes, I should say he will; but what do the medical men say?"

"They are very cautious, and I can get no decided answer from them."

"Of course you cannot; it hangs on a thread as yet, but I say he will recover." In his kindness he gave her all the hope he could.

Alice had gone out in the garden to take a little air, for the poor girl was faint and weary with her long watching, when she saw a gentleman on horseback cantering up. As he came nearer, she discovered it was Major Rasper.

"Why, Alice," he said, "who would have thought of seeing you here! It was

only by the merest chance I found it out. I was hunting the country all round to find out some straw for the horses, and I was directed here; so of course I rode on. I am married now, and am living not far from this."

"I knew it, Major; in fact, I knew it before you came to reside here regularly; but I thought you had come today about this terrible accident."

"What accident, Alice? I have heard of none."

She then told him all from beginning to end.

"Poor Duffer!" he exclaimed; "I am grieved—very grieved to hear it; and I trust it may not be so bad as you paint it; of course you will let me see him? By gad! it is horrible to think of. I sincerely hope, my poor girl, you will not be a widow directly you are married."

"What do you think of him, Major?" she asked, as they left the room.

"He is hurt—very badly hurt, Mrs. Duffer; but I fancy he will recover. I have seen men in a much worse state than

he is, pull through, and quickly, too. I hope you will both live long, and will be happy and comfortable. I am sure he may be in this place and with you. I shall often come and inquire after him."

A sick room is a sad place at any time; but this was an especially bad one. A young man, without any friend on earth save one, that one he had made his wife when at death's door.

Friends he had cast from him with a wasteful hand; and as he lay there, helpless and crushed, he thought with regret of what he might have been, and what he was.

Alice was a gentle and untiring nurse, and rarely did she leave his side; his wants were attended to, and his very thoughts anticipated.

The days passed wearily. What is there so trying to the sufferer, or those who attend on him, as a sick chamber. At the end of ten days he was pronounced out of danger, and a water-bed procured for him, for they were afraid from the time he

would have to lie there, that he would get sores on him.

Alice had her piano brought up in his room, and when he was in the humour, played and sang to him. Bluster and the Major would drive over and pass an hour with him. He would read and look through the papers, and in that way got through the day.

Weeks passed before he could be moved; but when he was, he rapidly regained strength, and in a short time he was able to be driven about in Alice's pony-chaise.

She was so pleased and proud to take him about, as he got stronger. She one day drove him to Brighton, and the first person they came across was Colonel Downey.

"By gad, Duffer! I'm glad to see you out again. I have heard all about you; doocid sorry I can tell you I was. We are down here for a few days; Cheltenham season over, and nothing to be done there; it is the very stupidest place I was ever at. All Mrs. Downey's doings. But, Alice, you must go in and see her. Here

we are at my door. I will take Duffer a little drive, while you go up and have a talk."

Alice went in, but unwillingly; she disliked leaving her husband, even for a moment. But there was no help for it, the Colonel was in her seat, and driving slowly away.

"Well, Colonel," said Shirkington, "how do you like married life?"

"By gad, my dear boy! don't say a word about it; you have no idea the life Mrs. Downey leads me; constant attendance she must have. Nothing half so jolly as in byegone days, when Spavin and I used to have out port and nuts together. Mrs. D—— wants walking out, driving out, dining out, and no smoking or grog of an evening. That last order, however, settled the matter; I kicked over the traces, set up a smoking-room, where I read my papers, and do just as I like. I bore it as long as I could, till human nature conld stand it no longer, and revolted. But you don't know what a devil of a life I lead in consequence. I was much better as I

was. I am something like my old chum, Jack Sampson; I'll tell it to you as we go along. Jack was a deuced fine fellow, by gad! one of 'ours'; we were subs together. But Jack was like many of us, and could not make both ends meet; in fact, we were so doocid hard up, that we were obliged to fly kites and back each other's bills. Well, we were sent into dull country quarters, and amongst other people got introduced to a corn merchant's widow; very wealthy, and with no children. She was about five-and-forty, not very good looking, and somewhat of the Dutch build.

"We soon stuck up a tick with her, and every man Jack of us that could manage to get a nag, went in for one; and it was allowed no such horses as ours were in the country for condition—six feeds a-day, and beans, my boy. Condition sold them, and we made a pretty good thing of it; buying nags for a mere song, high in bone, and low in flesh, and selling them at large prices in the pink of condition; we were beginning to look up.

"The band used to play twice a week

when the weather was fine, in the open, and on such occasions, to keep the widow in good humour, we used to take it in turns to promenade her about, of which she was mighty proud, she was, by gad!

"'Upon my soul, boys," said our Major, one evening, at mess, 'I don't know what is to become of us and our horses; the widow is getting chary and shy.'

"'What do you mean, Major?' we asked.

"'Why, she hinted, yesterday, we owed her nearly four hundred for corn, and spoke about an early settlement and all that. It will look so infernally bad, you know, to give up our nags—bring discredit on the regiment, and all that.'

"'Suppose I make love to her, Major?' said Sampson. 'Do you think that would be any good?'

"'Well, perhaps that might stave off the evil day,' replied our chief. 'But then, by Jupiter! she would be going in for marriage!'

"'What of that?' said Sampson. He had six strong tumblers of whiskey-and-

water in him, and was a fellow who, at any time, was up to anything. 'Upon my soul, I'm game to marry her, if she has got the coin she says; you know we are for foreign service; and Mrs. Sampson, poor thing! might be taken away with yellow fever, cholera, or something of that sort. A hot climate is the devil for carrying them off.'

"Well, Jack commenced next day by making tremendous strong running, and we heard no more for some time of the hideous little bill. Jack's visits to her were generally of an evening, after mess, when he had a skinful of grog—we did not drink much wine, for we were at low water-mark with our wine merchant.

"It was beautiful to see Jack of a Sunday coming home from church with the widow, carrying an armful of books, they had to pass the barrack windows, and we were generally there on the look-out for them.

"'It's the devil,' said poor Jack, 'this church business. I have to find all the places for her, and I don't know how to

do it. I'm obliged to have them all marked for me by our chaplain beforehand; and then when we get home, she will insist on my drinking three or four glasses of eighteen shilling sherry. I have told her a score of times I like Marsala better than anything; one would get that decent. I can't go on like this long; it's killing me; the stomach of an ostrich could not stand that infernal sherry.'

"But there was no help for it; something must be done for the honour of the corps.

"'Don't you think you could go in for the widow yourself?' Major asked Jack one day.

"'My dear fellow,' replied the cunning old fox, 'do you imagine I would deprive you of a fortune. I'm a field officer, and have enough to live on. But you are a young fellow, just entering on life, with fifty years before you. Go in and win, my boy. Have you not proposed yet?'

"'No, not yet, Major,' answered poor Sampson. 'Upon my life I have not courage to do so.'

"One day the duns came so thick on Jack, that he went boldly to work, and asked the widow to lend him two hundred.

"'Upon my life, my dear lady,' he said, 'if you don't grant my request, I give you my word I shall be obliged to sell out, which will be a great blow to me, as I like the service.'

"'Now I tell you what, Mr. Sampson, I'll do,' returned the widow; 'you are head over ears in debt, I know; and that old Major of yours is worse than all the rest. I'm owed over five hundred for corn. I tell you what I'll do, I'll buy you.'

"'Buy me, my dear lady? I don't know what you mean.'

"'Ah, Mr. Sampson!' exclaimed the widow, throwing herself into Jack's arms with a force that nearly knocked him off his legs. 'You do know what I mean—you have compromised me,' here she began to sigh and sob; 'you have been seen about walking with me, and paying me unmistakeable attentions, I can never show my face again. Marry me, and I will forgive

the ——th all they owe me. I have fifteen hundred a-year of my own, and my property here will sell for ten thousand; I want to see life; I want to be a soldier's wife.'

"Poor Jack was in the devil's own way, as you may suppose, although he did not owe above four hundred in the world, the offer was a good one, and not to be refused, so he closed with the bargain at once.

"Jack put the matter into the hands of the Major, who was very wide awake. The lady had the income she mentioned, and her place was worth what she said, but he could not get her to settle a single farthing on Jack.

"'He has his pay,' she said. 'I will give him what he wants in moderation, and purchase all his steps for him, but more I will not do.'

"So he was obliged to be contented with that; and she insisted on a grand wedding, with a swell breakfast.

"I shall never forget poor Jack, the day he was married. The whole of 'ours' were there. 'God bless you, old fellow!' ex-

claimed the Major, as Jack was jumping into the carriage which was to bear them away. 'I'll give you a week, that will do for you,' he said, with a wink, 'then I will recall you.'

"But before the week passed, the regiment was ordered to India.

"What a life that woman led poor Sampson to be sure. She was as jealous as Juno, and gave him no peace; but she kept her word and bought him all his steps. He got constant leave to go up to the hills, for the Colonel was afraid he'd cut his throat some day in sheer desperation. However, at the end of two years she popped off, leaving Jack about two thousand a-year, besides his pay. He is a general now, and out of the service; no man gives better dinners, or is better mounted; but he never tried marriage again.

"But we must turn back again. Mind you don't say a word about what I have told you, Duffer," continued the Major. "Mum's the word, my boy; we shall be here for another three weeks, so I will

manage to come over and have a cigar with you."

Poor Duffer was glad to get home again; he was tired.

"I thought it would be too much for you, Shirk," said his wife; "but you would go."

"I don't think it has done me any harm, Alice; but I am not so strong as I thought I was. What I should do without you I know not."

"I will always take care of you," replied his wife; "I only hope you will not go on as Colonel Downey does."

"What is the matter with him, Alice? he seems quiet enough."

"Oh, there is not much the matter; but Mrs. Downey says her husband is never at home, and will smoke; there is no harm in that; but to be always out, you know!"

"That is because she will never let him have a minute's peace at home, Alice. She is always nagging at him; he told me so himself, to-day."

"Well, that shall not be said of me

Shirk; as long as you are a good boy, you will never find any change in me, and your comforts will always be attended to; directly you are a little stronger, I shall take you away for change of air."

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK.

THE Russian said but little to Sir John Forest, and the little he did was not caught by either of the gentlemen.

"I shall now, Charlie, have a serious talk with Turtlefat," continued the Baronet. "It will not do for him to remain here any longer, for directly we are gone, that infernal Count would be trying to get an entré of the house again; not that he would succeed, but he shall not have the chance. I know Turtlefat will take my advice—it will be for him to return home at once; he is not half sharp enough for the continent." So, taking John Turtlefat aside, he had a long talk with him.

"I cannot tell you how much obliged

to you I am, Sir John," said the young man. "I shall follow out your advice to the letter, and by eleven o'clock to-morrow morning we shall be on our way to Paris. I must take leave of all your party now."

Mona was more than astonished when she heard her husband's sudden determination; but, with her woman's quickness, she felt sure that Sir John had advised her husband to take the step, and she was not sorry for it. She liked home far better than wandering about on the continent; she was so pleased to fall into her husband's ideas, that it never for an instant occurred to her to propose home.

Their arrangements were soon made, and early on the following morning they had left Naples, the old lady being just as delighted as the young one to be gone.

The 'Firefly' lay at her anchorage for a day or two more; but one morning she spread her white wings, and flitted away no one knew whither.

Mary came up on deck, which the gentlemen were already pacing, cigar in mouth.

"Why, we are sailing away!" she exclaimed. "Where are you going, Lord Verriefast?"

"Oh, we had enough of Naples, and are off a little further afield. We are bound for Greece, so you will soon have a chance of seeing the 'Maid of Athens.'"

Swiftly did the beautiful vessel glide through the water, which had hardly a ripple on it.

The days passed pleasantly enough. They stopped here and there, never sailing by night; but always brought up and at anchor.

At last they reached their destination.

"Now for fresh fruit, melons and Greek wine," exclaimed Charlie. He had picked up wonderfully during his trip, and was in usual spirits. His uncle, too, had enjoyed his trip amazingly.

They wandered about all day, saw what was to be seen, and did what was to be done.

"Let us get a good conveyance, and go up the country," said Charlie, one morning.

The only one who did not seem to approve of it altogether, was his uncle.

"You know, my boy," he said, "the country is in a very wild, unsettled state; but I suppose such a large party as ours would be pretty safe. There are four of us men, and we could take our six-shooters with us."

Lord Verriefast and Sir John thought there would not be the slightest danger; so the following day the six set off, taking their lunch with them, and each gentleman had his six-chambered pistol with him, and many rounds of ammunition.

The ramshackle carriage jostled over the rough roads, shaking them dreadfully; but they only laughed at it.

"If the old machine will only hold together till we get home," remarked his lordship, "we shall be lucky. I cannot say much either for horses, carriage or driver, who, by the way, seems to be a most taciturn fellow. One cannot get a civil answer out of him."

A little further on the nobleman had a regular dispute with the man, who insisted

on going one road, whilst his Lordship was just as determined on going another, very much to the fellow's disgust, who was in the end obliged to give in.

After a drive of some two hours, they came to a lovely spot, where they agreed to have luncheon.

"I don't think milords will like this place," remarked the driver, in broken English, "no tree—no shade."

"Just the very reason, my fine fellow, we prefer it," said Sir John. "We have a capital view here. Hang your trees and shade in a strange country, especially one like this. Give me a good site, where I can see all that is going on."

"Messieurs will do as they please," replied the man; "but it is impossible for me to remain here with the horses. No water—no nothing. I will go to a place I know of, not far from this. What time will Messieurs like the carriage?"

On being told, in three hours, the fellow mounted one of his animals, and rode away leading the other, leaving the carriage beside the road.

A lovely and enjoyable day it was; not too hot, with a gentle breeze wafted from the Mediterranean.

The things were unpacked, and they sat down to enjoy themselves at a little mound a hundred yards from the road; there were some very large boulders of stone, and from this spot they had an uninterrupted and magnificent view.

They soon dispatched their luncheon, and Charlie, lighting a cigar, strolled away with his betrothed, laying out plans, and talking as only two young people who are very much in love with each other can talk.

They might have proceeded nearly a quarter of a mile, when Thornhill's attention was caught by something.

His powerful glasses were instantly out of their cases, and at his eyes.

"Come along, Mary, darling," he exclaimed, after a short survey. "I am afraid there is mischief brewing."

"What is it, Charlie? oh, do tell me."

"Nothing much, dearest, only there are a lot of fellows about a mile off, in the

hollow there, coming this way; it will be better we get back to our party as soon as possible."

On arriving at where they had lunched, they found the old gentleman, Lord Verriefast, and Sir John quietly smoking their cigars. Lady Verriefast was strolling about a short distance off.

Charlie immediately reported what he had seen.

"By Jupiter!" said his Lordship, "if they should be these cursed Greek brigands, we shall be in a mess, for they would want a heavy ransom. Charlie, my boy, do you think that carriage could be pulled up here?"

Certainly it could, in five minutes, and before that time was passed, it was effected.

"If it is, as I fear," continued the nobleman, "the carriage is far better here than in the road; it might have served them as a cover. Here it will be of great service to us."

Lady Verriefast and her companion were in a state of great trepidation.

"Don't be alarmed, Bessie," said her husband. "Perhaps, after all, it is nothing; but there certainly is a lot of the fellows. I make out nine of them, Charlie. Hang it, we four can settle that lot if it comes to a fight. We could keep this place for a week against any reasonable number."

The carriage was drawn well into the stones, and the ladies placed in safety within it.

Lord Verriefast had taken the command of the little party.

"If it comes to shooting," he said, "we shall do pretty well, for we have each nearly thirty rounds, besides what we have in our pistols; but, perhaps, after all it is nothing."

"I can't agree with you, Verriefast," remarked Sir John, who had been attentively studying them through Charlie's field-glasses; "they are a ruffianly lot of looking fellows, and I see some have guns."

The men continued to approach, and shortly stopped exactly opposite to them

in the road, about a hundred yards off; here they had a consultation.

At length one detached himself from his comrades, and approached, having something white in his hand.

"No harm will come to milords Inglis, and the two ladies," he said in French, "if they will come quietly. All that will be required will be a moderate ransom, which, no doubt, milords can easily get."

"Look here, my fine fellow," replied Sir John, in good French. "Just go back and tell your fellows that we don't intend doing anything of the sort. We are all armed, and well armed, as you will find if you try it on with us, and, moreover, when we left this morning, it was well known where we were going. If we are not back by six this evening, assistance will be sent. We will pay no ransom, and if you or your companions come any nearer, we will shoot. It is as well," he said, "to show plenty of pluck. They are a cowardly lot of scoundrels; but I really did make such arrangements. Help

will come, and we must keep them off till it does."

The man returned, and presently the whole body was moving towards them.

"Now, Charlie," said Lord Verriefast, "you take the big fellow, he is the leader, shoot in the thigh, or dead if you like. We will all of us reserve our shots, to see what effect yours will have. If they still come on, then we must let them have it. I wish to God Bessie and Mary were safe. This is the doing of our rascally driver; it was lucky we came this road, or he would have let us into a nice trap. They have only old muzzle-loading guns."

The men continued to approach. "I'll cripple him," said Charlie, and as he uttered the word he fired.

A cry of agony followed the report of his pistol, and the man fell. He was quickly picked up by his companions, who rushed back into the road.

"There's one less," said Lord Verriefast. "Well shot, Charlie; we can lick all these fellows easily. My only fear is that more may come up, and then it will

be a bad business; we are in an infernal mess as it is."

There was a grand consultation held in the road, and some of them were gesticulating vehemently; one of them, after a little time, was seen to leave and go in a contrary direction to which they had come by.

"There," remarked Sir John, "is one gone for assistance. "This becomes serious. If it were not for the ladies, we could easily extricate ourselves. What do you think is the best thing to be done under the circumstances? You see their guns, bad as they probably are, could reach us where our pistols could not touch them. No, we must stick here and face it out."

Charlie had been looking anxiously about all the time.

"You see, Sir John," he said, "one is hopelessly crippled, and one is gone; so there are only seven men. Look at this little hollow behind us; well, the carriage conceals it from these fellows. If I could creep down there, I should have at least a mile and a half start before I could be

seen, and it is not probable they would see me. Athens is only eleven miles distant; I can easily do it in an hour and a half. What do you say to my trying; it appears to me the only chance we have, for you may depend they will be on us in numbers ere long."

"My dear boy," exclaimed his uncle, "how are we to part from you. Still, it seems to me to be a good plan; it is evident our rascally driver is in it, for the hour is long passed he was to have come back with the horses."

"Then I'll go, uncle. I must bid Mary and Lady Verriefast adieu," and he went up to the carriage.

"I am come to bid you and Lady Verriefast good-bye for the present," he said. "I will soon return with help."

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie, if anything were to happen to you. What an ill-fated expedition this has been!"

"And all my fault," said the young man sorrowfully; "if it had not been for me, the thing would never have been proposed."

"Oh, Mr. Thornhill," interposed Lady Verriefast, "do not say that it is any fault of yours. You did it for our pleasure. We are not a bit afraid; our only fear will be for you, that you may not get away safely."

"Have no fear on that head, Lady Verriefast; I shall be quite content if I get half a mile start. I am quite well and strong now, and they could never overtake me; besides, I have my revolver, and plenty of ammunition."

They were both pale and anxious as he took his departure, and watched him eagerly.

"God keep you, my poor boy," said his uncle, shaking him by the hand; "for your own—for all our sakes be cautious."

Slowly and cautiously did Charlie creep down the little gullet, watched with intense anxiety by his friends. At last they gave a sigh of relief, as he disappeared from view. They knew well that, as they could not see him, their besiegers could not, for they were considerably lower down than they were. Half an hour passed; yet nothing could be seen of him.

The scoundrels in the road were waiting patiently, smoking and laughing. They were evidently looking out for a reinforcement.

"By Jupiter! there he is," at length exclaimed Lord Verriefast. "Glorious fellow, he is at least two miles away, going along at a swinging pace. How the deuce he managed to get so far without us seeing him, I cannot imagine; but he has, doubtless, taken advantage of the irregularities of the ground."

This was the case. On getting out of sight of his friends, Charlie made play, and proceeded at a quick pace. As he got on lower ground, and caught sight of the hill on which his friends were, he proceeded more cautiously, keeping a good look out behind and before. He would not take to the road, because he knew he would be instantly discovered; but by management he kept pretty close to it, and out of sight.

"He is quite safe," said his Lordship, handing the glasses to Sir John, "he is

clean out of sight to the naked eye, and it is not likely these fellows have any glasses."

Day was now beginning to close, and with that beautiful sky which we, in our foggy little island, never see.

"We must soon keep our weather eye open," remarked the Baronet; "not that there is much fear they will do anything till they get help. At the rate Charlie was going, he will reach Athens in an hour and a half."

For an hour or more they sat smoking, and comforting the two ladies.

"Oh, George," said Lady Verriefast to her husband, as he came to the side of the carriage, "it will soon be dark, and then we shall all be murdered."

"It will not be dark to-night, Bessie; it is now full moon, and it will be even lighter in half an hour than it is now. Don't be afraid; if there should be any firing you are quite safe, for the carriage is thoroughly protected. They could not touch it from either side."

"But yourself, poor Mr. Thornhill and Sir John."

"Oh, have no fear about us," said her husband laughingly, though he was ill at ease; "we can take care of ourselves. There is plenty of cover for us behind these high rocks. Forest," he continued, as he rejoined his two friends, "these fellows have assistance coming; what is that moving down the hill to the right."

"Men," shortly returned the Baronet; "now comes the tug of war. They will be up in ten minutes; there will be no quarter, I am afraid. Charlie if he had luck arrived at Athens an hour ago; help for us is on the road I am certain. Seven more scoundrels are coming, I can count them now, that is fourteen in all—fearful odds."

There was a short consultation amongst the ruffians, as the two bands met. Again did one single himself out, and approach the little band behind the stones.

"No harm will come to you," said a voice, in tolerable English, "if you will give yourselves up to ransom; if

not, we will shoot you down like dogs."

"Fire away, my lads, then," bawled out the nobleman. "We will make it hot for you."

The answer was no sooner given than balls began to patter against the rocks.

"Keep well under cover," said Sir John. "Only one fire at a time; that will give us time to reload. What glorious things these breech-loaders are, to be sure; it is no use potting at them till they are within forty yards. There is a glorious moon now; look out, they are coming."

When Charlie had put three miles between him and his enemies, he struck boldly into the road, and went along at a swinging pace; he remembered the road well. The poor fellow was in a state of the wildest excitement, for he knew that his idolized Mary was almost in the grasp and at the mercy of a band of ruffians.

He had got some six miles on his road and was still pressing on at undiminished speed, with the perspiration pouring out

of him, when he heard the smart trot of horses coming. To conceal himself was the work of an instant.

In a few moments some twenty mounted military appeared, and amongst them he discovered the steward of the 'Firefly,' and their driver of the morning.

As may be supposed, Charlie lost no time in making himself known to them.

"If you will let me," he said, in answer to the one in command, "I will take you where you can come on them at once; but put no faith in that fellow," pointing to the driver.

"Oh, Mr. Thornhill, are the ladies quite safe?" asked the steward.

"They were all right, Sanders, when I left them. I hope to God they are so now."

The driver, who was with another pair of harnessed horses, was put under the charge of one of the troopers, and Charlie, jumping on the back of the other, they all moved off at a rapid pace.

Charlie took them as true as a die, by the road he came by. "We are now not

a mile off from where I left them," he said to the one in command. "By heavens they are at it," as the sound of rapid firing caught his ear. "Oh, that we were there!"

He thought of his gentle and beautiful Mary being exposed to all this, and his heart sank within him—of his old and affectionate uncle, the jovial Lord Verriefast, and the manly and generous Baronet.

They proceeded as rapidly as the nature of the ground would permit them; but caution was the order of the day.

Sir John had not said a bit too soon, "Look out, they are coming." The band of ruffians had evidently made up their mind what to do, for they separated into four bands, and were surrounding them.

The three gentlemen kept an eager look-out. Lord Verriefast, from behind his rock, took deliberate aim at one fellow, and when he was about five-and-forty paces off, fired.

The man threw up his arms, and fell heavily on his face, never more to move; he was shot dead, and Sir John at the

same instant lamed another. This staggered their assailants, who were nonplussed, and gathered all together again.

Lady Verriefast and Mary were trembling and half fainting in the carriage, and clung to each other convulsively.

"Are they gone?" they asked, as there was a suspension of the firing.

"Keep close," shouted his Lordship, and as he uttered it, a shower of balls pattered against the rocks.

"That won't hurt us," said Sir John, filling the chambers of his pistol; "don't waste a shot, Verriefast. When they get within range again, let them have it."

Lord Verriefast turned his head towards the carriage, to re-assure his wife, when a sight met his eye that filled him with joy. He turned, and fired the six chambers of his revolver rapidly at the group of ruffians, who were in close consultation, and gave a loud hurrah. "Charlie, by all that's glorious!" he screamed out.

Yes, there he was, with the troop close behind him, appearing over the brow

of the hill, and coming on at a quick pace.

The band of scoundrels turned to fly, but they saw it was useless, and throwing down their arms, begged abjectly for mercy.

"No one hurt, is there?" asked Charlie, bursting in among his friends.

"No one, my boy," answered the Baronet. "Thank God, Charlie, you came as you did; you have earned our eternal gratitude and thanks."

"There, there, Mary, you little puss, do not give way; it is all right."

The poor girl had in her excitement jumped out of the carriage, and was sobbing in her lover's arms, and Lady Verriefast was clinging to her husband.

The fellows were quickly disarmed and bound.

"Beautiful signoras," whined out one, in Italian, "pity for us;" but there was no pity from those into whose hands they had fallen.

The carriage was dragged out, and the horses harnessed to it, but it was not

entrusted to the Jehu of the morning; he was a prisoner with the rest.

The scoundrel knew the Englishmen were to be attacked, but their obstinately persisting in changing the route, and taking another road, had upset all his calculations; but on leaving them he had soon found out the band, told them where their victims would be found, and then, pocketing his douceur, cooly rode back to the town with the intelligence that the party had been attacked by brigands.

That an English lord, with a magnificent yacht lying in their roadstead, should be so treated, was too much for even the Greek authorities, and before the English Minister at Athens knew anything about it, a troop of cavalry was dispatched to their assistance.

Poor Charlie was dreadfully fatigued as he entered the carriage, which was driven by Sanders, the steward, but a nip of brandy soon revived him; and he was happy and contented, seated by her he was so fondly attached to

"I was pretty well baked, I can tell

you," he said, "when I came up with the troop; I had made the running too strong. I did those six miles in about fifty minutes; but I had a lot of rough ground to get over at first. However, I was in time."

The carriage proceeded but slowly, for as the English party would not quit the troop, and that was encumbered by the prisoners, a wounded man, and a dead body, it took them over three hours to reach Athens. There they were met by the English authorities, and invited to remain on shore for the night, as their evidence might be required in the morning; but this they refused, and made the best of their way on board the 'Firefly,' and most thankful they were when they reached her deck, which they had no sooner done than the whole of the ship's hands gave three British cheers, as only English sailors know how to cheer, and the band broke out with "Auld lang syne."

Mary was deeply affected as the grand old air floated over the quiet, moonlit

water, and she gave one or two convulsive sobs.

"What is the matter, dearest?" asked Charlie.

"I am so happy, so grateful for yours —for all our escape. There is something in the music to-night which quite overcomes me. What a pity—what a disgrace that in such a beautiful land as this there should be such hideous crimes! Do you know, Charlie, I shall never be comfortable till we get safely home again."

"My dearest little pet, you are tired, overcome and excited by the day's work; go below and get into bed as fast as you can. Lady Verriefast has just gone down; it is late, and the night is getting chilly. I am going to smoke a cigar with Verriefast and Sir John before turning in."

The three gentlemen, for old Mr. Thornhill was too tired, talked and smoked for a long time. The men had a double allowance of grog given them, and were smoking and chatting on the forecastle, for no one seemed inclined for sleep.

"By George! Sir John," said Lord

Verriefast, "we will be off in a couple of days for home. I shall be in a state of perpetual excitement after this, till I get Master Charlie here home and married; if anything were to happen to him that little girl below would break her heart."

Three days after the above conversation, a cloud of white canvas might have been seen pointing towards Gibraltar; it was the 'Firefly' on her homeward voyage.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DUEL.

Old Mr. Thornhill was delighted when the yacht left for home. He had heard all about the Russian nobleman, and this last affair of the Greeks had completely upset him; so it was with the utmost satisfaction he saw the classical land growing fainter in the distance.

The yacht sped swiftly on her way, her white wings glistening in the sun, she raced along throwing the blue water aside as she wended her way back to the land all on board loved so well.

They had decided on stopping at Gibraltar a few days. Charlie had some old friends who were quartered there who he was anxious to see, and Mary and Lady Verriefast had been promised a sight of

the wonderful rock, that has survived so many strange and eventful scenes.

At last it loomed in the distance, grand and imposing, and as they neared it its bold outlines became more distinct.

"It looks even grander now, Mary," said Lady Verriefast, "than when we passed it the other day. Is it not magnificent? but beautiful as it is, beautiful as are the different places we have visited, there is to me no place like home."

"Or me either," replied her friend. "I was anxious to come on this trip, and I am quite as anxious now to be back again. I do not know how it is, but I have a misgiving our travels will not end without some disaster or other."

"I cannot say I share your apprehension, Mary; surely we have had enough excitement for one voyage. Still, I must say it will be the utmost satisfaction to me, to all of us, when you and Mr. Thornhill are married, and quietly settled at dear old Linden Hall. Your father, I see, is fidgety, and Lord Verriefast, I know, will be glad to be home again."

The vessel was soon after the above conversation riding at her anchorage, and as it was early in the day, Charlie at once went on shore to pay his visits and look his old friends up.

He was not long in finding them out, and right glad they were to welcome him.

"Who on earth would have thought of seeing you here, Charlie?" said Captain Ross, an old school-fellow of his. "We have heard of all your doings; poor fellow, you had a devilish near shave, though; that comes of going out with fellows who know nothing of shooting, and who are careless into the bargain. But you have pulled through wonderfully well, and look yourself again. The way you rode that steeple-chase was splendid; quite your old form. Of course you dine with us this evening; I shall take no denial. To-morrow all your friends shall see the rock; they must lunch with us, and we will lionize them all over the place."

Charlie agreed to dine with his friends, and sent a note to his uncle saying he

should not be on board till the evening, and to have the boat at such a place for him at ten o'clock.

He wandered about with his friends, talking of old times and their boyish days, till the hour approached for dressing for mess.

He had sent for his things, and was soon in the ante-room.

"By-the-by, Thornhill," said one, "a gentleman dines with us this evening who knows something of you all, and he says Miss Thornhill is the most beautiful girl he ever saw. He met you at Naples—the Count Orloff; he was only speaking of you yesterday, and asked if we had seen anything of the 'Firefly.' You never saw such a fellow at écarté in your life; he cleared us all out a few evenings back. He is a good fellow though."

"I know something of the gentleman," replied Charlie, drily, as he turned to listen to the band, which was playing some well-remembered English air.

The young man was sad; a presentiment of evil had come over him, and it

was connected with this Russian Count, who entered at this moment, dressed in the height of fashion.

He started slightly, and bowed to Thornhill, who returned it rather distantly.

The dinner was good, and passed away merrily, for the soldiers were delighted at having one like Charlie to dine with them, and one so well known to several of them.

"Now let us adjourn to the ante-room, Charlie," said Captain Ross, "that is if you have had enough wine, and have a cup of coffee and a cigar." This they did, followed by some few more. By degrees others came in, and presently the room was full.

Amongst the last who came in was the Count; his face was somewhat flushed, and it was evident he had not spared the bottle, though he could not be termed the worse for liquor.

He was talking earnestly in French to a German Baron, a very nice fellow, who seemed to be dissuading him from some-

thing, but which the other evidently did not listen to.

Charlie was relating his adventure amongst the Greek brigands when the Russian joined their party. He listened attentively whilst Thornhill was speaking, and when he had finished said, somewhat sarcastically,

"You all got off very well, and I am very glad of it, otherwise I should not have had the pleasure of meeting you here."

"I am much obliged to you, Count. Yes, we had a narrow escape. I do not know how we should have fared—a heavy ransom, I suppose; but I had hit one of the fellows with my revolver, so perhaps I might not have got off so easily as the rest."

"Mr. Thornhill seems more ready with his pistol with a set of brigands than he does with gentlemen," said the other, with the utmost coolness.

Had a thunderbolt dropped amongst them, it could not have caused greater consternation than these few words did.

"There is no mistaking your meaning, Count," said the young man, with the utmost composure; "but I really do not see you have any right to say so."

The Count was playing with one of his gloves as Thornhill said this.

"You think not, Sir," replied the Russian. "No doubt you think so; this is an opportunity I have been anxiously awaiting for, and I am delighted to be able to tell you, before your friends and countrymen, that I consider you a faint-hearted cur," and as he said this he struck him across the face with his glove.

The instant this was done the Count was laying on his back, for a blow from Charlie Thornhill's fist had floored the illustrious foreigner; he was lying on his back, his face literally deluged with blood.

"I call you to witness, Ross, Churchill and others, that this was not of my seeking. I am very very sorry it should have occurred here; but I take a blow from no man."

The confusion was great. They rallied

round Charlie, who was pale, but perfectly collected.

"Will you see me through this, Ross?" he asked, hurriedly; "of course there can only be one termination."

The Count had risen to his feet, and looked ghastly with his blood-stained features; he was trembling with passion, but was at last taken from the room by his German friend, who presently returned.

The officers were talking in knots as he did so.

"Here comes the Baron," said Ross, "with a message for you, Charlie. Refer him to me; I will see you through it, old boy. It may cost me my commission; but I will chance it."

"Of course, Monsieur Thornhill," said the German with great politeness, in French, "you must be aware that after what has passed, and the way my friend has been treated this evening, there is only one way this matter can be arranged."

"He brought it on himself, Sir," replied

the young man sternly. "Do you suppose for one instant I would be struck by anyone, and not return it? I more than regret it should have happened here amongst my friends, and in their room. I might very well decline to go out with your friend for various reasons that it is needless to enter into now; but I will indulge his wish, and give him a meeting. My friend Captain Ross will arrange matters with you. But remember, Baron, advise the Count to come no more here, for I shall this evening put down on paper, in case I fall, the reasons why I do not think his presence in a mess-room desirable."

"You need not do that, Charlie," replied his friend, "he never enters our quarters again. It is deuced lucky none of the chiefs were present this evening; otherwise there would have been a devil of a row. Now I must go to my quarters with the Baron, and do the needful for you. I am quite ready, Baron, for you," turning to him; "take a cigar, and we will adjourn to my rooms."

Thornhill sat down, lit his weed, and

talked away; but a cloud had descended on them all.

In half an hour Ross came back, and called Charlie aside.

"It is all arranged, old fellow," he said, "you will go down quietly to the landing-place at ten o'clock, meet the 'Fire-fly's' boat, and go aboard as if nothing had happened. Write what letters you have to, and turn in till five o'clock when I shall send a boat for you. Put on your darkest clothes, we shall have a drive of nearly six miles to the ground. I will bring the tools for you; our fellows will be mum, so there is no fear of interruption."

"Many thanks," replied Charlie, and they turned away to join the others.

At half-past nine Ross said: "Now, my boys, Thornhill is off, we must have a glass of grog all round. And mind, not a word to a soul. I have your words, have I not?"

"Certainly," they answered.

"I am deuced sorry, Charlie, for this," continued his friend, "that it should have

happened here, but it cannot be helped now. I'll see you through it though. God bless you, old fellow." And he tossed off the contents of his glass. "Now then, come along; I will go with you to the boat."

All pressed eagerly forward to take him by the hand. "Good bye, Thornhill. Keep your pecker up, old chap." "Wing him." "Take him over the hip," and such like exclamations greeted him as he took his leave. Wishing them a hasty good-night he left the room with his friend.

They walked in silence down to the boat, which was already there.

"Good-night, Charlie; mind, five o'clock to-morrow," and the friends parted.

He was soon on board, and found them all playing a game of loo instead of being in bed, as he expected.

"How have you enjoyed yourself?" they asked.

"Famously, good dinner and good wine," poor fellow, he was forced to put on an air of gaiety that he little felt. "I never enjoyed myself more."

They had not the slightest suspicion of anything being wrong, and after a short time each went to their respective cabins.

Charlie and his uncle occupied one between them. Here was the difficulty, how was he to dress in the morning? Luckily the old gentleman was a sound sleeper, and the young man no sooner saw that his uncle was well off than he arose, dressed himself carefully and stole out. It was now past twelve o'clock; in the saloon he sat down and wrote a long letter to Mary, and another to his uncle, explaining everything. Then throwing himself on one of the sofas, fell into a troubled sleep; he awoke every now and then with a start, thinking he had overslept himself, and looked at his watch, but finding it wanted hours to the time dozed off again.

As day approached he grew more restless, and finding he could not sleep, went quietly on deck. Not a soul was about except the watch on the forecastle, it was just half-past four and a lovely morning, everything looked so calm and quiet. He

thought that this might be the last time he would ever see the sun again; he was no coward, quite the contrary, but he had a horrror of duelling, and to take life in cold blood seemed to him terrible. And to be shot at by a deadly hand bore no very pleasing reflection, but as he remembered he had been struck, it made his blood boil.

He was in deep thought when he saw the boat approaching, there was only one man rowing it, as it approached closer he saw that it was his friend.

Not a word did either utter, and as the boat came alongside Charlie stepped into it and pushed off.

"Everything is ready, old fellow," said the Captain, when they had got out of ear-shot of the 'Fire-fly.' "My trap is waiting for us. I have been up all night getting ready; the tools had to be cleaned, the doctor to be talked over, and the trap to order. I can assure you my time has been fully occupied. I cannot tell you how I regret this, but there is no help for t now."

"I am most thankful, I am sure, Ross, for all your kindness and the trouble you have taken. God knows I had no wish or intention of making a quarrel."

"My dear fellow, you could have acted in no other way than you have. I am afraid he will not apologise for striking you. No, Charlie, you could have done nothing else. He is a deadly shot I am told, so you must be cool, but you are just as good a one."

The boat now touched the shore, and getting out, Ross gave her over to a man who was waiting for him.

The two then stepped smartly away, and after some quarter of an hour's walk came to the trap which was to take them on to the spot chosen. A regimental doctor was in the cart with a servant.

"Here we are, Doctor," said the Captain. "I hope we have not kept you waiting for us. Jump up, Charlie," and the four drove off. The five or six miles they had to go was speedily traversed for the horse was a good one.

"First on the ground at any rate," re-

marked the Captain. "Now, Charlie, a word or two with you. I have arranged with the Baron that with two such shots as you and the Count are, that you shall be placed at sixteen paces, and fire by drop of a handkerchief; we shall toss for that. Be cool and collected; very likely the Russian will attempt to unnerve you in some way or other, he is, I am told, a noted duellist and used to these hateful things."

"My nerves are right enough, Ross," replied the other, "you will take charge of these two letters for me, old fellow, and give them to whom they are addressed, and if anything should happen to me, tell my uncle that——, well, never mind, all is explained in the letter to him. Here they come."

It was on rising ground where the three stood, waiting the others who were approaching.

The Count was laughing and smoking a cigar, as was the Baron. There was a stranger with them who turned out to be a medical man as well, and a Frenchman.

They bowed as they met, and the Count as he raised his hat slightly took a quick anxious glance at Thornhill.

"I brought a medical friend with us, Captain," said the Baron, "but I see you have Doctor M—— with you. How are you, Doctor? A beautiful morning, is it not? Now, Captain, we will just look out for a nice level bit of ground, but it all seems pretty good here."

As the two walked away, Charlie was left with the regimental surgeon, the Count and the other a few paces off. They were conversing in French. But every word they said was understood by Thornhill.

"This makes my ninth *petite* affair, Doctor," said the Russian, gaily, "the last one was with a countryman of my own, a married man, he fancied I was a little too attentive to his wife. A charming creature. He had heard of my pistol shooting, and came on the ground as nervous as a school-girl, lots of pluck, but he was thinking of his young wife, and this sort of thing was new to him. I

felt certain of my man. I would have spared him; just taken him in the thigh, or something like that, but Madame was charming, so I shot him through the heart. I was mistaken though, the lady would never look at me, and died a few months after. I wonder what Mademoiselle will say and do, when she hears I have killed her lover."

Charlie moved away to avoid hearing more, the words that had dropped from the Russian had steeled his heart, and whatever compunction he might have had, vanished; and he resolved if he could to shoot the cold-blooded monster.

The ground had been paced off and a couple of sticks placed to mark the spot, and the two seconds proceeded to load the weapons.

"Baron," said the Count, as the German had finished loading, "a word with you. You surely don't intend to put us up at that distance—you know twelve paces is my length."

"We have arranged it otherwise, Count, you are in my hands and must be guided

by me, if you are not satisfied, I will withdraw from the ground."

"Of course, Baron, of course—but I want to shoot him, you know."

"You will be quite near enough to do so, Sir," said the German, drily.

"And who gives the word?" asked the other.

"Captain Ross, Count, won the toss; you will fire on the drop of the handkerchief, not dwelling for an instant, as the handkerchief leaves the Captain's hand you both fire."

"Now, Charlie," said the Captain, coming up to his friend, with a flushed face and anxious look. "I must place you—for God's sake old fellow be cool. I give the word—fire as I drop the handkerchief—the pistol is light in trigger, so keep it well up."

Thornhill took his place, with his right side towards his opponent, and his left arm behind his back, giving his adversary as little as he could to aim at.

He was a handsome fellow, the model

of a fine, well-grown young English gentleman as he stood up before the other.

"Mind, gentlemen, you fire together, you know the signal, the dropping of my handkerchief," cried the Captain, "now attention."

As the Count stood opposite and eyed his young opponent, a sneer crossed his face—the handkerchief fluttered in the Captain's hand and then fell.

Both pistols were discharged simultaneously, and both remained standing, but the Count's pistol had dropped to the ground.

"By heavens, Charlie, you've winged him," exclaimed his friend, running up to him. "Thank God, my boy, you are unhurt, a devilish near shave though, the ball has gone clean through your hat, only two inches above your head—stay where you are whilst I go and see what is the matter."

Charlie had smashed the Count's pistol arm just above the elbow.

What an agonizing, revengeful look he gave the Captain as he came up, a look that gentleman never forgot.

"My God! Baron," he exclaimed, as his friend the German told him that Thornhill was unhurt, that the ball had passed through his hat, "it is all your fault. I told you twelve paces—and to load lightly—the overcharge saved him, curses on it; I'm maimed for life!" and as he uttered this he fell fainting to the ground.

Thornhill seeing this ran up. "Don't say I've killed him, Ross," all his bitter feelings had vanished as he regarded the fallen man. "Oh, God! don't say I've killed him."

"No, no, Thornhill, my dear boy, be calm," said the regimental doctor, "he's worth a dozen dead men yet; you've spoilt his shooting for ever though, there is not the slightest doubt his arm must come off, we must get him back as quickly as possible."

"Now, Ross, take your friend away, and get him on board the yacht as quick as possible."

He required no second bidding, and they were soon driving rapidly away.

Old Mr. Thornhill was up and on deck

at six o'clock. "Have you seen Mr. Charles?" he asked of the steward.

"No, Sir," replied the man, "but Phillips who had the morning watch, told me that a boat came off this morning at five o'clock, and Mr. Charles went ashore in her."

"Very extraordinary," muttered the old gentleman. "There is something wrong in this; if he had been going on shore this morning he would have told us of it." And he proceeded at once to call Sir John Forest.

"He has got into some mess for a thousand," said the Baronet, jumping up, "this secret expedition means no good. I would not have anything happen to him for all I possess, what are we to do?"

"Well, I'm sure I do not know, Forest, perhaps we had better wait till after breakfast, then we will go on shore; it is close on seven now."

Charlie was so anxious, that instead of proceeding at once to the "Fire-fly," he went to his friend's head-quarters to wait and hear what the medical men said.

The news of the duel soon got bruited about, and closely as the secret had been kept, it was quickly the talk of scores of people.

The man-servant, that had gone with Charlie and his friend, had said on their return that one of the gentlemen had been shot, this was passed from mouth to mouth, when someone knowing one of the gentlemen came from the yacht, and concluding it was Thornhill who was shot, at once proceeded to the "Fire-fly" to give the news.

Mary had got up early, and when she stepped on deck, to her surprise found Sir John and her father pacing it.

"Why, papa, dear," running up and kissing him, "you are early, and so is Sir John. I thought I should be the first up."

Neither gentlemen knew what to say. "Why, the fact is, Mary, Thornhill called me," said the Baronet, after rather an awkward pause. "Charlie got up very early and went on shore, funny is it not? I cannot make it out, not that it is any-

thing of consequence, he will turn up presently, and see there comes a boat off."

But as the boat came nearer, it was seen Charlie was not in it.

"Ah! he is breakfasting with his friends and is sending to let us know," observed Mary, "too bad of him to steal off in this way, and we are all to go on shore too to see the Rock."

"Well, my man, what is it?" asked Sir John as the boat came alongside.

"The young gentleman," replied the man, "I'm very sorry, Sir, to be the bearer of ill news, but—"

The Baronet held up his hand as a warning, but he was too late, the girl had heard it.

"Go on," she said, looking at her father who was as white as a sheet, and trembling all over. "Go on."

"Well, Miss," continued the man, touching his hat, "I'm sorry to say he's shot."

"Shot!" she almost screamed, "what do you mean?"

"Why, Miss, it seems he and a Russian Count had some words at the mess last

night, and they went out this morning, and the gentleman's shot."

Mary gave one low, bursting sob, and fell fainting into her father's arms.

"Man one of the boats at once," said the Baronet to the captain, who had joined them. "Great God! what a horrible thing," and he rushed below to call Lord Verriefast.

The whole ship was in a state of tumult, for Charlie had endeared himself to all of them.

The boat was soon under weigh, with Sir John and Lord Verriefast in it. Poor Mr. Thornhill was left sobbing over his insensible child; Lady Verriefast in tears, and trying to recover her unconscious friend.

"Give way, my men, with a will," exclaimed his Lordship, in his impatience. "What an unfortunate thing; it's that damned Russian Count for a thousand. The poor fellow has been hounded into it, you may depend."

They were quickly on shore, and making the best of their way along, when who

should they meet, coming along at a rapid pace, but Charlie himself.

"Thank heavens you are safe," simultaneously uttered both gentlemen, as he came up to them. "We have heard it all, and that you were shot. Mary is in a dead faint on board."

"I am all right," replied the young man, as they turned towards the boat; "it is the Count who is shot—not killed, but badly wounded, though not dangerously. I will tell you all the particulars on board; but I am not in fault—he struck me."

They were quickly on board again, and Charlie made the best of his way to the saloon, where Mary was just coming to herself. As she caught sight of his well-known face, she rushed screaming towards him.

"Hands aft and uncover mainsail," was heard soon after. The 'Firefly' was to depart at an instant's warning; the anchor was a peak and all was in readiness. They only waited for the news of the Count that Captain Ross had promised Charlie he should have.

The Captain shortly afterwards appeared. "All right, Thornhill," he said, as he stepped on deck, "I have come myself to tell you; he has lost his arm, though. The doctors said there was no hope of saving it, so they put him under chloroform, and took it off. He will recover, not a doubt of it. I shall be home nearly as soon as you are; I go on leave; it is all arranged—there, good-bye. I can't wait another instant; I will look you up *chez vous* soon."

An hour after this they had put a long distance between them and the land.

"No more stoppages, Charlie," said Lord Verriefast, "till we get to the old land. You really are the most unfortunate fellow I ever saw for getting into trouble, and by no fault of your own."

Poor Mary Thornhill had been terribly excited by the event of the morning; but she got calmer as the outline of the rock got fainter in the distance.

"Charlie," she said, as they sat together on the deck, "you must promise me one thing, or I will never be your wife."

"What is it, dearest?" he asked.

"That you never again, under any pretence whatever, fight another duel; I shall be weeks before I get over the fright of this. I think another one similar would kill me."

"Well I think, Mary, I can safely promise you never to be tempted again. I did not seek it; but to be struck before a lot of gentlemen, many of whom were perfect strangers to me, was more than I could bear or put up with."

"So it is, Charlie," said Sir John, who had caught the last words; "but you have done quite enough to prove you are no coward, and, my boy, this is your first and last affair of this sort. You have passed your word, which is quite sufficient; but you will soon have him in charge, Mary. You must see if you cannot take better care of him than we do; I shudder to think what might have been the consequences. It is all your fault, though; why will you captivate the men with that bewitching little face of yours. I shall soon have to put you down as a regular flirt."

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW AN EX-GROOM BECAME A MAN OF SUBSTANCE.

Mr. Pastern had done but little since he left Colonel Downey's service. Lately he had become a great man again, for Bluster had taken him on again. As long as he kept away from drink, no one could do a horse better than Pastern. His master had now only two, the same he had purchased of Allsnob, in Yorkshire. So Pastern was taken on again, with the explicit understanding he was to give up drink, at least, during the day. This he had done, and he really looked quite a different personage.

He was sitting one evening in the little bar-parlour of the "Hen and Chickens," the chief hostelrie of the village in which Bluster now resided, about three miles

from Brighton. This said inn was kept by a buxom widow of forty, who was doing a brisk business; the house, garden and stabling were her own, with thirty acres of meadow land, and not, as she said, "a single sixpence owing on it."

Pastern had often thought what a famous arrangement it would be if he could only induce Mrs. Martin to change her name, and that he could call himself the landlord of the house. He had thrown out sundry hints, but they had not as yet been taken, and all he had effected was an entré into the bar-parlour, where he sat of an evening, smoking his long clay and drinking his rum and water, and it is only fair to him to say he had not exceeded in his libations.

Well one evening, as I have said, he sat in the parlour; Mrs. Martin and her barmaid were busy serving customers, when a little dapper man entered, and asked if "there was a Mr. Pastern in the house?"

"You will find him in the bar-parlour, Sir," pointing to the door, and wondering

at the same time who the spruce little gentleman could be.

"Good evening, Sir," said the stranger, entering. "Are you James Pastern?"

"Yes I am, Sir; what might you be wanting with me?"

"I want a good deal, Mr. Pastern; I have hunted you from Brighton, and I had some little trouble there as well as here before I could hit on you."

"Never mind, you have found me now, Sir, alive and kicking; would you like something to drink, Sir."

"Presently, Mr. Pastern, presently; you had an aunt?"

"Yes, I had, housekeeper to a gentleman in London. I've not heard of him or her for nearly twenty years."

"Or are you likely to do so, Mr. Pastern, from the simple fact that both are dead; the gentleman died years ago, and left your aunt an annuity of a hundred a year. Her savings in service and since her master's death are six hundred pounds, which is yours by will. That is the sum I have to hand over to you, after

all charges and costs are paid,—six hundred pounds which, well invested, will bring you thirty pounds a year, and even more. I must take your instructions in London, where you must sign the necessary papers."

"Six hundred pounds, why it's a fortune, Mr. ——"

"Brice," replied the other, "here is my address. I think you had better come up to-morrow."

Pastern was nearly beside himself with joy. Six hundred pounds—his most ambitious dreams had never taken such a high flight as this.

"Well, Mr. Pastern, I must bid you good-night; for I must be off now. Nothing to drink, thank you; I have a cab at the door, and by starting at once I shall catch the mail for London."

Pastern sat pulling at his pipe, in a deep reverie. "Well I'm dashed," at last he said. "Six hundred pounds—it's a thundering lot of money, and by a careful investment might double itself quickly; I have it."

"What have you, Mr. Pastern?" asked the widow, who that instant entered unperceived by the groom.

"Why I should like to have you," replied he valiantly.

"Lor', Pastern, don't talk such nonsense."

"There ain't no nonsense in it, I can tell you, Mrs. Martin. Look here, you saw that little gent that came into me just now; he's a lawyer from London, and came to inform me that my old aunt Martha is dead, and left me—how much do you think?"

"Perhaps twenty-five pounds; perhaps a hundred."

"What do you think of six hundred pounds, Mrs. Jane Martin? every blessed halfpenny of it."

"Lor', Mr. Pastern; and what will you do with such a sum? Well, I am glad, I'm sure."

"Do with it, Mrs. Martin; will you share it with me; with this house and that coin we can do pretty well, I reckon."

The matter was soon settled between them. Mrs. Martin agreed to change her name to Pastern.

"There's stabling here for eight horses, and four loose boxes; I shall fill these, Jane," he said, as they sat over their tea. "I must do a little in the horse-dealing line. This is in the midst of a hunting country, such as it is; but I can make it answer, I know," and after discussing various plans, they separated for the night.

Bluster was more than astonished at the news his servant gave him, and as he was a good-natured fellow, congratulated him on it.

The next morning Pastern betook himself to London; but the same evening saw him in the little bar-parlour of the "Hen and Chickens."

"It's all settled, Jane," producing a cheque-book, "and the money lodged, and it only remains for you and I to fix a day; the sooner the better."

After the usual pleadings for delay on the part of the lady, it was agreed that

they were to be married the following week—which they were.

Pastern was now a man of substance, and was soon busy at work. He gave up drinking more than was good for him; the stables and loose boxes were done up nicely, some of the fields divided, and sheds put up, and he commenced as horse-dealer and breeder. He had half-a-dozen good brood mares, and other horses always on sale. The first he bought were those of Shirkington Duffer's, the two he had purchased in Yorkshire; the poor fellow's nerve was gone, and by his attentive little wife's advice, he sold them, and invested in a nice pair of carriage horses.

Pastern's place was soon the talk of the surrounding country. If you wanted a hunter or a carriage-horse, Pastern's was the place to get it; if he had not the animal you required, he would soon get it for you. He worked hard, and money came in fast, and he was careful of it; there was no denying he was sharp practice, but he was as honest as many of the others. Money-making became his

idol, and he determined to extend his operations, and go into a fresh line, and that was a little racing.

It soon became known that Mr. Pastern was owner of a pretty good pair of platers. He contented himself with the small meetings, where he was pretty certain to win. Pastern was almost grown out of people's knowledge, he was so altered; he was dressed in a sporting style, and had grown a beard and moustache, in fact, the Pastern of former days was not to be recognised in the spruce, smart, well-to-do Pastern of the present. He did a little in the betting line too. At home he was grand, and seated in his little bar-parlour, with a few choice friends with him, he was an emperor of horse-dealers.

"Racing and steeplechasing is all very well," he said to an admiring audience, "for them as understands it, but where one does, a hundred know nothing about it. Then the hasses they will go betting and piling on the hagony, not thinking what they are doing. A man as makes a book

mustn't be too particular, if he is, he's rooked to a dead certainty. Then, bless you, many 'osses is put into tip-top fettle, and fit to run for their lives, but it ain't intended for them to win, that would not suit the stable, or the owners either; they've worked the oracle another way, and they win by their horses losing, and the public is thereby let in. No, 'oss racing is a very ticklish thing to meddle with, I can tell you. I remember once as nice a young gentleman as ever I knew, he would go in for it, and as he had plenty of money, he got together a very good but small stud. One year he was very lucky, and skinned the lamb at most of the meetings. He had one horse in at a light weight for a very good thing, but his friends forestalled him in the betting. The horse ran, and won in a canter, but his owner did not land much. 'It is all very well,' he said to them, 'you have humbugged me to the last moment, saying you would get it on for me all right. You would not allow me to back my own horse, because you said I should spoil the betting

and a good thing, and that if I would only keep quiet, you would get plenty on for me. What have you done? Nothing; not bet a shilling for me. You know I would have laid four to five, or even six to one, but you kept me quiet to fill your own pockets at seven to five, and which you have done pretty handsomely at my expense. This is your friendship. Too bad of you.' A short time after this horse got into another good thing, and a regular rush was made to back him. It was a mouse to an elephant on him. The horse started, and was coming well away, when he bolted, and of course lost the race. His owner, people said—but it could never be proved—won thirty thousand pounds by his horse's losing. Of course he had got friends to lay against the horse for him, and so he let all in. That's the way they work it now. Betting is a trade —a livelihood to thousands. You wouldn't believe the dodges they are up to."

Pastern was one morning looking over his stables, when a well-dressed man came

into the yard. He was evidently a gentleman.

"I want," said he, "a little conversation with you, Mr. Pastern, if you are quite at liberty."

"At your service, Sir," replied the ex-groom, touching his hat. "Walk inside, Sir."

"You are, I think," said the gentleman, "dabbling a little on the turf?"

"In a small way, Sir, a very small way; it's more in 'osses I deals, but I have a couple of middling platers just for amusement's sake, as it might be; but they pay, and have paid well hitherto."

"Just so, Mr. Pastern. Well, I am Mr. ———," giving his name.

"What, the great Mr. ———?" said the other, in astonishment.

"Yes, the great Mr. ———, if you will have it so. Now, what I have to say is strictly between ourselves. I have your word never to divulge a syllable of what I am going to state to you?"

"Not a word, Sir. Mum's the word. I'm as close as wax."

"Good," said the stranger. "Now, I have a horse going for a large stake. He carries an immense sum of money, but he must not"—dropping his voice to a whisper—"win—you understand?"

"I twig, Sir."

"Now," continued the stranger, "are you willing to go into the market and lay against him?"

"Of course I am, Sir, if I can see my way, but I must be made safe."

"Certainly you will be, but it is a very ticklish business."

"Never mind that, Sir. If I'm made safe I can work the oracle. What might you propose giving me for my trouble?"

"Well, I propose five hundred pounds."

Mr. Pastern whistled softly.

"You're going against him heavily," he said.

"A fortune," replied the other; "but, now I come to consider of it, it will be better for you to do it through an agent, if you will undertake it. I will give you five thousand five hundred in notes. The five thousand you must pay at once to the

agent, and give me his receipt for the money, the five hundred you keep for yourself. You will go up with me to town at once, then we will take a cab, and go direct to the agent. Does this suit you?"

"This is your own horse you are laying against, Sir?" asked Pastern, interrogatively.

"It matters not whose horse it is. I am supposed to be backing him heavily. So I am, but I am laying against him still more heavily; I shall win ten times more by his losing than I should by his winning. Say yes or no."

"Why, yes, of course, Sir, I am your man. I will be with you in five minutes."

And he bustled away to prepare for the journey. The two were soon on the road to London, which they reached in due time. Taking a cab, they pulled up short at a well known betting agent's, and Pastern got out, and proceeded the rest of the way on foot, his companion waiting for him in the cab.

"It is a large sum," remarked the agent,

as he was taking down the numbers of the notes; "it cannot be all got on here, I must work Birmingham, Liverpool, and Manchester. Are you laying out this money on your own account?"

"Every farthing of it," replied Pastern. "You will let me know from time to time how you are getting on," and giving him his address took his departure.

He did not proceed direct to the cab till he had assured himself no one was following him.

"Is it all arranged?" asked the other, as Pastern made his appearance.

"All settled, Sir, and here is the receipt for the money."

"Good, Pastern; the cab will put me down at my club, and afterwards take you on to the station if you choose. I suppose you are going back at once. I shall see you from time to time. I never write on matters of this sort. Now, if you are wise, you will invest that five hundred on your own hook at the price the horse will be soon. You may make five thousand of it; you will never have such a chance

again. Here we are. Now, mind, Pastern, you keep your mouth shut."

"Well, this is a start," soliloquized Pastern, as he was driven towards the terminus, "five hundred pounds for doing as one might say, nothing. I wondered how he found me out, but law, those fellows knows everyone that may be of the slightest use to them. Make five hundred into five thousand, might I? Well I won't risk it, safe bind, safe find."

Great was the consternation when it became known that Mr. ———'s horse 'Mystery' had been heavily laid against, all over the kingdom.

"What was the matter?" was asked, "was the horse amiss? caught a cold, or doing bad?"

But nothing was the matter; the horse was as well as could be, in strong work, and as well and fit as possible.

But sinister rumours got abroad of his having been easily beaten in a trial, and that he would not last under the weight, &c. All this Pastern read in his paper.

"I don't care for all that," he muttered,

"I ain't going to lay a farthing against him. It's a rum start, and I can't make it out."

Still the horse went down in the betting, and as much as 44 to 1 laid against him. 'Mystery' from being first favourite, was now clean out of it, an outsider, and it was even asserted he would be scratched.

But he was not scratched; and the horse continued as well as ever he was, though not in good favour in the ring.

The day approached for the great race, yet 'Mystery' did not come into the betting. But a day or two before the meeting there was a reaction, and the price advanced a little. Knowing ones shook their heads and talked about something being amiss; but then coming from such a great stable, he would be sure to go on the square.

The day at last arrived, and thousands were on the course to see one of the greatest races of the year.

What a crush there was by the betting men and those interested to get a peep at

the horses amongst which 'Mystery' might be seen walking proudly along. What a cry of admiration there was as he was stripped of his light clothing. All who understood anything about the matter, could not but allow he was the very pink —the perfection of condition.

"Well, what do you think of him?" asked a voice at his elbow. Pastern turned and beheld Major Rasper.

"Ah, good-morning, Major, glad to see you, and looking so well. What do I think of him? Why, he looks fit to run for a man's life, for a kingdom."

"There's nearly enough money, Pastern, on and against him, to buy a kingdom."

"Do you stand against him, Major?" asked the ex-groom.

"No, Pastern, I do not; on the contrary. I took 44 to 1 ten times over. I stand to lose ten pounds, and win four hundred and forty."

At last the horses took their preliminary canter.

Those that had laid against him looked

anything but comfortable as they saw his easy and grand action as he strode along, mounted by one of the most brilliant and fortunate jocks of the day.

It is needless to describe the race, the maddening excitement of the countless thousands, when 'Mystery' *Won in a Canter.*

Pastern turned pale as he thought of what might have been the fate of his five hundred pounds if he had laid against him. He had won the exact sum the Major had, for he had been tempted to risk ten sovereigns.

"I see it all now," he exclaimed to himself, "cunning devils, all of them. They backed their own horse at first but could not get on at the price they wanted; they risk perhaps ten or twelve thousand pounds to draw the horse back in the market, and then take all the odds by commission, and at 44 to 1 they must have done pretty well; but to try and put me in the hole, and tell me to lay against him; a nice gentlemanly trick. Dashed if I'll ever bet another farthing!" And he never did, he

had made nine hundred and forty pounds out of the transaction, and thought he had done enough.

Pastern became quite an altered character, with money came importance and proper behaviour. He looked after his affairs well; he both bred and sold horses, but never ran another after the "great sell," as he called it.

The "Hen and Chickens" throve under the careful and watchful eye of Mrs. Pastern, and it was allowed on all hands that a better conducted inn was not to be found. But Pastern never meddled in household matters, his horses were his hobby and he made a good thing of them, and he passed away his time as merrily as might be.

Having brought him so far on his stage through life, we here take leave of him.

CHAPTER IX.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

THE "Firefly" sped merrily on her way homewards, carrying a fair wind with her. A great load was off Mary's heart as she saw the grand old rock sink, and gradually die away in the distance; but still there was an unaccountable sadness on her which she could not shake off—the presentiment of evil was still upon her though she tried all she could to do to shake it off, and appear gay.

"What is the matter with you, Mary?" asked Charlie, as they were pacing the deck, "you are not yourself at all, there is no occasion to be frightened now all is over."

"Would that I could think so, Charlie,

but I am so sad, and I scarcely know why. I wish with all my heart we were safe and sound at dear old Linden Hall again."

"So you will be soon, dearest, we are getting on famously, the vessel is positively tearing through the water—she is going as fast as a steamer."

"Yes, Charlie, I know that, but still it is a long way—that affair at Athens, and that still more horrible duel of yours has quite unnerved me, and so it has Lady Verriefast."

"Well, well, Mary, you must cheer up, a few days will see us at home again; then you will have your favourite Sultan to ride, and I shall be able to go about with you."

The vessel made good way; but when off the coast of Cornwall the wind shifted, and the yacht laboured a bit; the glass too had gone down, and there was every appearance of dirty weather.

"What do you think of it?" asked his Lordship, as he paced the deck with his captain.

"We are in for nasty weather, my Lord,

it looks uncommon threatening, and there is always a heavy sea off this coast when there is cap-full of wind—but she is making good way all the same."

The captain's words proved true, for it became worse and worse; it was now for the first time that they experienced any inconvenience—the vessel rolled and laboured, for it was blowing half-a-gale, and they were under very short canvas. Dinner passed uncomfortably, they were very uneasy as they went to bed, for the wind still increased.

The crew were all on deck, and two men were now at the helm.

Lord Verriefast had given directions he was to be called if the weather got worse, for he was exceeding anxious.

About three o'clock he was awakened by the steward. "The Captain wants you on board immediately, my Lord," said the man, "it is frightful weather—blowing a hurricane."

"Call Mr. Charles Thornhill, steward, and be sure no one awakens the ladies."

He was quickly on deck, followed by

Charlie, and they there beheld a sight that made them shudder.

There was a fearful sea on, boiling and raging, the waves with their white crests chasing each other in wild confusion.

"Where are we?" asked his Lordship, shortly.

"Off the Lizard, my Lord. I caught sight of it just now, but the haze is too thick to see it at present, the wind is blowing dead on shore, and the tide is against us too. So we cannot beat out, besides the vessel could not carry canvas enough to enable her to do so, if the weather would only moderate a little we might do."

"And what will be the upshot of this, Captain?" asked Charlie, "if it continues like this two hours more."

"We shall go on shore, Sir," returned the seaman, "I've set canvas to keep us off already but it split like a rag, nothing can save us if it goes on like this."

"This is horrible, most horrible! can nothing be done?"

"I've done all I can, Sir, you see your-

self what a sea is on, and the gale too; if we were only further down I could make Falmouth. God help us if we are drawn much nearer on the coast."

The ladies were up, poor frightened things huddled in the saloon. Sir John and old Mr. Thornhill did all they could to cheer them.

"Is there no hope?" asked Lady Verriefast, as Charlie came down dripping through.

"I won't say that," returned he gravely, "but we are getting fearfully near the coast, it cannot now be more than a mile off, and the tide has yet four hours flow; but we must not give way, what can be done will be done, we have an able captain and a willing crew."

The morning drew on, but there was no abatement in the weather, it blew as hard as ever, and the coast was painfully near.

The noble yacht rose like a cork on the angry waves, everything that seaman's craft could suggest was done to keep her off the iron bound coast, but to no purpose; people could now be seen on shore, for the

signal gun of the "Firefly," had been fired constantly.

The captain was standing to windward with his glass to his eye, scanning intently the shore.

"Oh, George," sobbed poor Lady Verriefast as her husband entered the saloon, and throwing herself into his arms, "to be so soon married and so soon parted, is there no hope?"

"None, Bessie," he replied, "unless God succours us, the vessel and all in it are, I fear, doomed."

The poor frantic women cast themselves on their knees, in earnest prayer, crying and sobbing at intervals—now lamenting they had ever come on this voyage—now praying to God to help them in their distress.

"I see the people making signs, Mr. Charles," said the captain. "I have it now; there is a little still water yonder, but we shall never reach it. A few minutes will decide our fate; no boat can live in such a sea. Get two anchors ready for'ard," he shouted; "hoist the storm

gib, and hands up mainsail; if we can only carry on for a quarter of a mile more, there might be a chance, though a poor one."

Scores of people were now congregated on the shore, rushing wildly about, and making signs towards a comparatively quiet bit of water.

"Will she do it, captain, do you think?" asked Lord Verriefast; he was very pale, but collected.

"There's no yacht afloat, my Lord, can sail nearer the wind than the 'Firefly.' We must go between these two rocks; once inside, I think we might do; but the wind comes puffy now. Keep her up," he bawled to the men at the wheel, "as close till you see the sail shiver in the throat."

Gallantly did the yacht bear the strain on her. She crept along towards the desired spot; but kept drawing nearer and nearer the fatal shore. Her decks were deluged with water; but, considering all things, she stood well up. Frightfully near did she approach the rocks, the men at the helm watching with anxious eye when to

put the helm hard up, and let her go through the narrow opening. They wanted no telling; they knew full well that their lives—the lives of all on board depended on their steadiness.

Nearer and nearer they came; one might have thrown a biscuit on some of those tremendous rocks, with their jagged edges.

"Stand by the anchors," roared the captain, his face was flushed, and his eye wild.

"God help us now!" he uttered, as the sides of the vessel positively touched one of the rocks; but at that instant her helm was put hard up, and she flew through the narrow opening, the water curling over her stern, and nearly burying her. Then her helm was reversed again, and she flew up to wind on the instant, her canvas flapping in the gale.

Then there was a rattle of the chains as they ran through the hawse-holes, and the yacht rode with her head to wind.

A loud cheer echoed along the shore

from fifty stalwart throats, which was answered by the crew of the 'Firefly.'

"Do they hold?" asked the captain, moving forward. "Down jib and mainsail."

Anxiously he regarded the tightened links of iron; but the anchors did not draw, and the noble boat rode like a duck on the water.

Lord Verriefast was much moved. "Tell them below, Charlie," he cried, "they are safe; and, captain, when all is snug, give the men a double allowance of grog, and tell them I shall give them twenty pounds each as a present."

A sorry appearance did the saloon present; the two ladies nearly dead with fright, lying on the floor, and drenched to the skin from the water, which had found its way down.

"Lady Verriefast—Bessie darling," he almost shouted, "we are saved—miraculously saved," but they could give him no answer.

Sir John had been knocked down insensible from the swing lamp, which had

not been secured, or had broken from its fastenings, and was only just recovering from the blow, staring wildly about, and old Mr. Thornhill was moaning over his darling daughter.

But by degrees they became collected, and the saloon put ship-shape. The gale, too, began to die away as rapidly as it had risen, and in a couple of hours it was comparatively calm, though far too rough for any boat to go on shore, or one to come to them.

But at two o'clock in the afternoon a boat pushed off from shore, manned by those hardy Cornishmen, who fear but little; it approached near enough for those on board to hear there was no danger of their anchors starting, and that they were in good holding ground.

All the things had been packed, for they had determined that the instant they could, to go on shore, and at five o'clock they were able to do this.

The largest boat was got ready, but they had great difficulty in getting into her; but at last they did, and were pulled

to shore, which was only a short distance. No sooner did the boat touch ground than a couple of score of brawny arms dragged her by sheer force up high and dry, and then another cheer rent the air.

There were two ladies amongst the crowd, and one, approaching Lord Verriefast, as he was standing by himself giving some directions, said,

"Perhaps I ought not to ask it, Lord Verriefast—" she had got thus far when he turned, and his face flushed scarlet as he saw his old flame of St. John's Wood, who had married Bruton.

"My God! I beg pardon, Emily—Mrs. Bruton I mean," gasped his Lordship in the utmost confusion; "how on earth—you here?"

"Simply, my Lord, because I live close by. Of course I know how you are situated, but there is only our house and the clergyman's near here that you could go into; but Mr. Gammone will, I am sure, receive you and Lady Verriefast, and I will take in the remainder. Mrs. Gammone is here to ask you."

The poor Lord was in a terrible dilemma, his former mistress on one hand, and the man he had forced to return to his wife on the other; but his Lordship did not take long to consider, so he did what was best under the circumstances —told his wife who it was.

As her Ladyship had seen Mrs. Bruton before, it was no news to her, so, going up to both ladies, thanked them sincerely, and it was arranged Lord and Lady Verriefast and Sir John Forest were to go to the clergyman's, and Mr. Thornhill, Mary and Charlie to the Brutons.

"Well, my Lord," said the clergyman, who had stood aloof, for he did not know how he would be received till his wife told him, "I am glad, heartily glad you let by-gones be by-gones. Thank God I am a different man, and I have to thank you for it."

"Not a word on your part, Gammone. I am only too happy to think I was in some way the means of making you return to your beautiful wife; you know I was no saint myself, but her Ladyship has over-

looked all my 'faux pas;' how far is your house from this?"

"Not a quarter of a mile, and as I see Lady Verriefast and Miss Thornhill are thoroughly done up with fright and excitement, it will be better to get them away at once."

The things were now all landed, and old Mr. Thornhill and Sir John, with the ladies, took their departure for their homes *pro tem.*, whilst Lord Verriefast and Charlie remained behind to look after the affairs of the yacht.

"What is best to be done, Captain, do you think?" he asked, as he stood on the deck of the vessel again, with Charlie by his side.

"Well, my Lord, the wind has dropped and the glass gone up, but I think it would be dangerous to try and warp her through that passage this evening; on the other hand if it comes to blow again, we might be knocked to pieces here. I prefer sea-room."

"Have no fear, Captain," said an old Cornish boatman. "I've knowed the place

for more than fifty years, let her lay here till next tide, it's the only place for many a mile you could lay in; and by God's goodness as you are here stop here, it's good holding; get an anchor out aft to prevent her swinging, and I'll go bail the vessel will be all right. Let her sail on the early ebb to-morrow morning, we will get her out of this rat hole all safe; do you, my good gentlemen, go up and lay down a bit, for us boys will stick to your vessel."

The generous nobleman then and there made them a present of twenty pounds to divide amongst them, and went on shore again, and when he arrived at the clergyman's house, found his wife in bed and fast asleep from over exhaustion.

He then walked over to the other house with Sir John, Mary was in bed too, so the gentlemen all sat down to a quiet cigar.

Gammone and Bruton he found thoroughly happy and contented with their lot, though little was said on past matters, their houses though in a wild part of the country, were beautifully situated, and with every comfort.

They separated as dinner-time approached, and when Charlie got up, which he did early next morning, he found the wind had shifted, and the white sails of the "Firefly" just visible in the horizon, the vessel was hull down and carrying a splendid breeze towards Plymouth.

Both Lady Verriefast and Mary were too unwell to move next day, and were pressed to stay, which they accepted, as the two houses were close by, the gentlemen walked about and looked over Bruton's farm, which was in prime order.

The following morning they were all driven to the nearest station and on their way to Plymouth, carrying with them the good wishes of a speedy journey home from their hospitable entertainers, who always after received various presents of game and venison from Mr. Thornhill and Lord Verriefast.

"We must get on to Ryde," said his Lordship, "and see if we can beat the yacht, I ordered her to go there. A few days in the Isle of Wight will do us no harm after all these adventures."

It was a beautiful evening as all walked down the pier at Ryde, where they had got without any further adventures; the place was crowded, and the narrow escape of the yacht had found its way into the papers. Lord Verriefast was well known, and he could hardly take a step without being congratulated.

Mary had recovered all her fatigue and was looking lovely, and so the gentlemen thought as they turned to look at her, wondering who she could be, and the handsome young man beside her, but they met lots of friends who knew them, so it soon oozed out who they were.

"By Gad! why here's a surprise, why who the dooce would have thought of meeting you here, Verriefast?"

It was Colonel Downey who had come over with his better half from Brighton for a week's airing.

"Good gracious, mamma, I am so surprised," echoed her Ladyship.

Mrs. Downey was evidently glad to see her daughter, she had heard nothing of their adventures, and the three ladies were

soon seated, going over their several histories. Sir John, Mr. Thornhill and Charlie strolled on, but the Colonel managed to get Lord Verriefast to himself.

"You look uncommonly well, Verriefast, I must say. Marriage agrees with you, for my part," the poor Colonel sighed, "I'm nearly dead, I am, by Gad! Mrs. Downey would leave Cheltenham. I knew such a lot of old chums there, you can't imagine. I never tasted such curry and port in my life as at Croker's, formerly of 'ours,' Bengal Jack we used to call him. Well, she found fault with my dining out so often, and tried to knock the smoking on the head, and would go down to Brighton to see her old friends—fancy going to that damned hole in the middle of summer, well what the dust did not do for me the heat did—it was worse than being in the tropics—I nearly got a sun stroke, I did by Gad! then she came on here, and has nearly walked me off my legs twice a day on this infernal pier; by Gad, it's enough to kill a fellow, I cannot have a weed in quiet, and, Verriefast,"

here he dropped his voice into a whisper, "she has a temper that would try an angel."

"My poor Colonel," replied the nobleman laughing, "yours is not a pleasing picture of married life, but we must see what we can do for you, I'll have a talk to Madame; but mind you don't say you have spoken to me on the subject. I'll give her a good fright."

On joining the young ladies again, he managed to get Mrs. Downey apart, and giving her his arm, which the lady was immensely flattered at, said, "Well, Mrs. Downey, how do you think your daughter is looking?"

"Charmingly, Lord Verriefast, I never saw the dear girl in better spirits."

"I wish I could say the same for the poor Colonel, Mrs. Downey, I never saw a man more altered in my life, he looks haggard and worn; you won't have him long if he does not alter. He wants quiet and well looking after, his game of billiards to amuse him, his cigars, and so on, he does indeed, poor fellow, I was quite shocked to see him."

"You quite frighten me, Lord Verriefast. I thought he was so well—it must be as you say. I had no idea but he was in excellent health."

"Have you effected any good, Verriefast?" asked the Colonel, as he got near the nobleman again.

"All right, Downey, I've done it for you, mind you are deuced unwell; cannot walk much, and smoking relieves your chest."

The next morning, as they went on the pier, they found the 'Firefly' had arrived all safe, and on going on board, everything was as straight and in good order as if nothing had happened to her; and a sail round to Ventnor for the next day was decided on, to remain there the night, and then on to Cowes, where the yacht was to be laid up again.

The ladies had got over all their nervousness and narrow escape. The Colonel and his wife were, of course, to be of the party.

They arrived at that beautiful spot early, and went on shore to enjoy themselves. Strolling along the beach they came across

a lady who was attending a sick man in a bath chair, which had been drawn as near the shore as it could for the invalid to enjoy the scene.

Lady Verriefast, as she glanced at the well-dressed woman, saw it was no other than her old maid, Alice Lee.

"Why, Alice!" she exclaimed, darting forward, "I am indeed glad to see you." But the colour rose to her cheeks as her eye encountered that of the invalid, Shirkington Duffer.

"Don't turn away, Lady Verriefast," said the poor fellow, "and let me speak to his Lordship. I am a different man to what I was. I hope all is forgiven. I have been ill, very ill, and if it had not been for my dear wife here, I should have been in my grave long ago."

"My poor fellow," said the nobleman, taking his hand, "of course all is forgotten; you do indeed look ill, don't fatigue yourself, your wife will tell us all." Then followed Shirkington's adventures.

"He caught cold, my Lord, after he was nearly well," said his wife, "and had

a relapse; but he is getting better now. All his horses are sold, except those he uses in the carriage. I do hope everything is forgotten."

"Say no more, Alice, not another word, you must both come and lunch with us on board the yacht. I will take no denial."

It was Charlie Thornhill and Sir John dragged the chair down to the boat which was to take them on board the 'Firefly,' and a merry party they were.

Poor Duffer was wonderfully altered and subdued, he was quiet and gentlemanly in his demeanour, quite a contrast to the Duffer of former days. All his bragging had left him. His gentle, attentive, little wife was unremitting in her attentions on him, and covered him up carefully as he was placed in the boat that evening to convey him on shore.

"Good-bye, Duffer," exclaimed his Lordship, shaking hands with him, "you will constantly hear from us."

"I'll give you all the news of the place, Duffer;" said Charlie, "you'll pull

through, old fellow, as I did, and take care of that good little wife of yours," and so they left him.

They arrived at Cowes next day, and then winged their flight to Yorkshire.

The first thing Charlie found on arriving home was a letter from his friend, the Captain at Gibraltar. "The Count is all right," he wrote, "but he has lost his arm, which will prevent him doing anymore in the fighting line. You will see me soon after you receive this, and remember, old boy, I am to be your best man."

CHAPTER X.

MISSING AND FOUND.

It was with no small degree of satisfaction, all found themselves at home again. Mary was especially rejoiced; her flowers, her birds, her favourite 'Sultan' had all to be visited. Then her marriage with Charlie was soon to take place, and preparations for that important event had to be made. Then there were visits to be returned, and old friends to be seen. Lord Lavender and Captain Slyfox and old Mr. Conyers were the first who came to offer their congratulations. Then Major Bouncer Brag put in an appearance.

"I never saw you looking better, Thornhill," he exclaimed, "I have given up all idea of shooting again, that last affair was too much for my nerves. I have sold all

my guns. I shall go in for hunting and coursing."

Old Nurse Grimes was overjoyed to see "her boy," as she called him and could hardly be kept out of his room.

Altogether the place held a regular jubilee. Dinners were given and returned, and future ones planned.

Charlie and Mary were very quiet through it all, they lived for each other. The young man remembered how tenderly and carefully she had nursed him through his dangerous illness, and of her thoughtful attention of him on all occasions; and his love for her almost amounted to a madness.

They rode and walked together, and were rarely separated, and she in her turn was just as fond of him. They visited his horses, and his dogs, took them out for exercise in their visits to the cottages about.

Old Mr. Thornhill, too, was quite a different man. He was occupied in his house, the rooms that his daughter and future son-in-law were to occupy must be newly

renovated. Carpenters, upholsterers, and paper-hangers were at work. A conservatory must be made from Mary's boudoir, so Linden Hall was in a state of the utmost confusion.

Then Charlie would drive Mary over to the Slyfoxes, or Lady Lavender, or Verriefast, to be engaged on some knotty point connected with her *trousseau*. And whilst she was so occupied, Thornhill would wander about with the gentlemen, smoking his cigar, or engaged in a game of billiards or pool, they were fine players and had many a battle together.

The time flew by rapidly and it only wanted a fortnight to the marriage.

Mary was one evening walking in the park alone about half-past six in deep meditation, Charlie was away dining at Sir John's. Her thoughts were on him, and she was wishing the time to arrive for his coming home.

Happening to look up, she saw a gentleman at a distance approaching towards her.

"I wonder," thought the girl, "who

that can be; it is not tall enough for Charlie, or anyone I know." But as the stranger came nearer with rapid steps, she became deadly pale, and clutched at a tree for support.

"Mary, my darling," exclaimed the stranger, rushing forward to catch her, for she was nearly fainting. "Look up, it is me. I have wandered half over the world to find you, and here you are under a changed name, and in a strange land."

"Oh, Henry, Henry!" murmured she, "how is it you are here in England, and at such a time? I am about to be married. Have you come to crush all?"

"No, Mary, no, God forbid!"

"You would drive papa mad if he knew you were in the country," she said. "For God's sake go! I will do anything on earth for you I can, if you will quit this place."

"I have been lingering here a week to see you," he returned, "but I did not think I should have been received thus coldly."

"I am not cold, Henry; I love you dearly, but consider how your being found

here may affect my future. It is madness of you to remain—insanity."

"But, Mary, darling, consider how I longed to see those I loved." And he imprinted a kiss on her cold forehead.

She laid her poor aching head on his shoulder.

"If you love me, Henry, go for the present, at any rate. Do you want anything?"

"No," he replied, gloomily, "I want nothing. I have lost all I cared for. I will go, since it must be so, but meet me here to-morrow evening at eight for the last time, Mary, it may be for ever."

"If you promise me faithfully to leave this to-morrow night I will come," she said.

"God bless you then!" And kissing her once more hurried away.

She walked home with slow and measured steps. A blight seemed to have come upon her, and it was as much as she could do to conceal her agitation from the keen eye of her father.

The whole of the next day she was on

thorns, dreading to meet either her father or Charlie, and she was infinitely relieved when the latter told her he was going to ride over to Sir John's on business, and would not be back till nine or half-past in the evening. She got terribly nervous when the time approached; her father was sleeping quietly in his arm-chair by the open window, for it was a lovely evening in the middle of August. Stealing gently from the room, she took her garden-hat, which was lying on the hall-table, and strolled out in the park towards the place of rendezvous, which was about half a mile from the house.

As she got out of sight she quickened her pace, and soon arrived at her destination. The stranger was waiting for her, leaning against one of the trees.

"Ah, my pet," he exclaimed, as she came up. "You are punctual to a second."

"If you knew the misery, Henry, you have caused me by coming here, I am sure you would never have done so. I am in terror that you should be discovered. We must move away from this, or we shall be

certain to be seen." And they walked away into a more retired spot.

Long and earnestly they talked, the stranger with his arm thrown carelessly over the girl's shoulder as they lounged along.

Now, it unfortunately happened that Charlie, having finished what he had to do much earlier than he thought, and Sir John having gone out to dine, called for his horse and took his departure; the evening being lovely he extended his ride, not coming home by the usual way, and entered the park by quite a different direction.

He was walking his horse on the velvety turf, when he saw a couple of figures a short distance in front of him; they were lounging quietly along, with their backs turned to him, the gentleman with his arm thrown over the lady's shoulder.

Charlie started as he caught sight of the figures.

"It is deuced like Mary," he exclaimed to himself; "but it cannot be, some couple spooning; rather cool of them to come

here, though." But as he drew nearer he became deadly pale, his lips were firmly compressed, and his breathing became short and laborious. "God of heaven!" he uttered, as he pressed his horse into a trot, "who could have thought it?"

So engaged were they talking, that they heard him not till he was close upon them, when they turned and saw him.

Charlie never stopped, and merely lifted his hat, but gave her a look that she never forgot to her dying day, one so sorrowful, sad, and full of reproach, that goaded her almost to madness.

"Charlie, Charlie!" she screamed, "come back—speak to me!"

But he heard her not as he cantered away.

"Look at what you have done," she said, as she turned fiercely on her companion. "You have almost broken our hearts already, now you have quite done so. Go; I will not stay another instant." And she fled from him in terror.

Arriving at the Hall, she inquired for Charlie, and the butler gave her a note,

saying, Mr. Charles had left it for her, and had gone up to his room for a few minutes, and then ridden off again in great haste.

Mary, with trembling hands, opened the note, read it, and then fell fainting to the ground.

The contents of the paper was short. It ran thus:

"Mary,

"You will not be surprised that after what I have seen, that I have left the place for ever.

"C. T."

The whole of the house was in the utmost consternation. Mr. Thornhill was called, and was bending over his insensible daughter. He could make nothing out of the note, and till his daughter came to, he was obliged to remain in ignorance.

Directly the poor girl returned to her reason she was led away by her father into his room, and in a few minutes after the bell was rung, and the carriage ordered out instantly to fetch Sir John Forest.

In less than a couple of hours he arrived, but only remained a short time, and was then driven rapidly away to the station. There he found Charlie had gone on to London. He could not follow for three hours, so he went away to his own house to make a few preparations, and returned again in time to take his seat for town.

Mr. Thornhill next day called on Lords Lavender, Verriefast, and Captain Slyfox, and it was given out Mr. Charles Thornhill had been called away on urgent business, and that the marriage would most likely be postponed.

Sir John, on arriving, went immediately to Charles' bankers, but he had been there before him, drawn five hundred pounds, and taken letters of credit on New York.

"Mad, impetuous boy!" muttered the Baronet, as he got into his cab, and drove to a well-known inquiry office. There he engaged a man known all over Europe for his cleverness in tracing people.

"It is an easy matter to find out what vessel sailed for America; he will go by

the first boat, Sir John, you may depend," said the man.

And as it was from Southampton the vessel sailed, away they went, but they arrived too late; she had gone, and Charlie with her.

There was nothing from that port for several days again, but finding one sailed from Liverpool on the next day but one, away they went, and took their passages.

Sir John had written to Mr. Thornhill telling him of all his movements and proceedings, that he had traced Charlie, and started for America in his pursuit.

"Tell Mary," he said, "not to give way. I will find him, and bring him back as soon as possible. What a pity all this was not explained to the poor fellow before, what misery it would have saved; however, it was done for the best."

Their passage to America was not so quick as it might have been. The steamer that had sailed from Southampton was the faster boat, and had, moreover, three days start of them, and arrived six days before that of the Liverpool one.

In New York their first real difficulties commenced, but with the assistance of the police they discovered that it was Charlie who had taken his passage from Southampton. They called on the firm his letters of credit were on, but he had not yet been heard of; they searched all the hotels—no easy task, but could get no news. A month passed, and Sir John was nearly in despair; the English agent he had brought out with him worked hard, but could get no information. At last, one morning as the Baronet was at breakfast, he presented himself.

"I'm on the track at last, Sir John."

"No, are you?" exclaimed the Baronet, jumping up.

"No doubt of it, Sir; we have a long journey before us."

"Hang it, man, out with it at once; we follow if it is to the world's end."

"He has gone to Mexico, Sir John. This is how I came on it; I found out that a gentleman had bought a saddle-bridle and some other horse matters at a large saddler's here, so I went at once.

They were packed, and addressed to Mr. Charles Thornhill, at a gun-maker's; I was soon there, as you may suppose. At that place he had bought a double-barrelled gun, a couple of six chamber revolvers and some ammunition, stating he was going on a hunting expedition to Mexico, and afterwards to the Brazils. I have followed him now to every place he has been to, for everything was addressed to this gun-maker's—boots, clothes, even tobacco and a couple of wooden pipes; we are on the right track now, Sir John."

"Bravo, bravo, Scott!" shouted Sir John; "go and get what things you may deem necessary, and I will do the same. Which route has he gone by, though; have you thought of that?"

"Yes, Sir John, that too I have discovered; he has gone by St. Louis."

A short telegram was soon despatched to Mr. Thornhill, for Sir John spared no expense; when he once took a thing in hand he carried it through.

Old Mr. Thornhill was walking with his

daughter in the park, when the yellow envelope was put into his hand.

"This is news," he said, as he hastily opened the envelope, with trembling hands. The poor girl was deadly pale, and almost fainting.

The contents were short, but cheering.

"Tracked; gone to Mexico, and from there to the Brazils—follow at once."

"Thank God, Mary, for even this news. Come home, my darling, our friends must know of this at once, for they are just as anxious as we are."

The next morning Sir John and his indefatigable companion had left New York, and were on their way to St. Louis. From there he was known to have proceeded to Santa Fé. Here another lock occurred, which took them some days, and at last he was found to have proceeded to a frontier village on the banks of the Rio Bravo del Norte, lower down. Here he had bought a horse, and all trace was lost of him.

But Sir John was not a man to be easily discouraged, so he engaged some native hands.

From place to place was he tracked; sometimes they almost thought he was close at hand, but he had mysteriously disappeared.

This sort of life was nothing new to Sir John; he liked it, and if it had not been for the anxiety attached to it, would positively have enjoyed it.

He was well mounted, as was his companion, and each carried his double-barrel and pistols.

For weeks did the two, accompanied by their peons, wander about; but at last they got certain intelligence that such an one as Charles was reported to have been at Santiago. Thither they proceeded at once, and he was found to be hunting in the Apache country. Here they traced him about for some time, and found he had again turned towards the Rio Bravo del Norte. Sir John was nearly done up, and both he and his men were obliged to

remain for days inactive, to give themselves and their horses rest.

It is no easy work to travel about in free America, and always on a stern chase.

One day, however, the Englishman came back with positive intelligence that Charlie had a small hacienda on the banks of the river.

"We must proceed cautiously, Sir John," he said, "for I have discovered he is of very lonely habits, goes out for days together without returning; he is well known on his bay horse."

They were soon off again, for there seemed some chance of coming up with him at last.

The hacienda he was supposed to inhabit was only a small one, of one storey high; it was perched on the crown of a little hill, surrounded with the beautiful trees and shrubs for which Mexico is famous—the acacias, yamias, yuccas and cactus, mingled with the corazo, palm and giant aloes; it was, indeed, a wild, beautiful and romantic spot.

Riding up to the door, a woman presented herself, with the "*Que quiere?*" (What do you want?)

"Señor Capitan Thornhill," replied one of the men.

"*Cavalleros*, he is out," she answered in English, seeing they were not of her country.

"Is this Mr. Thornhill's house?" asked Sir John, impetuously.

"*Si, Señor, si*—Ramon, Ramon," she called, in her shrill voice.

A man presently made his appearance to the summons. "*Que quiere?*" he asked, but seeing two of the principal ones were English, like his master, said in good English, "You want my master; he is out, Señors, and I don't know when he may be back. Are you friends of his?"

"Yes," replied Sir John,, "and come all the way from England to see him."

"*Carrambo*, but he is sad, very sad when he speaks of your land, Señors; sometimes he is as fierce as a tiger. But what a *cavallero* he is; he can already throw the lasso as well as I can."

"Well I only hope, Ramond, he will not lasso me," said Sir John, laughing, "what time, if he comes home this evening, is he likely to arrive?"

"In twenty minutes, Señor; it will be well for you all not to be seen at once; he will come that way," pointing in the direction.

Sir John departed at once to meet his lost friend, and he had ridden some little way, when he perceived a horseman coming towards him.

He was dressed in a light English shooting jacket, boots up to his knee, and he wore on his head a sombrero, laced and banded; his hair was long, and his beard immense.

He was mounted on a noble bay horse; at his saddle-bow was coiled his horse-hair lasso, and in his hand he carried his gun.

Sir John pulled up, and stood transfixed at the figure approaching him.

"Charlie, Charlie," he called out, as the other came within speaking distance,

"don't you know me, my boy. Thank God I have found you."

"Sir John!" said the other, in the utmost amazement, "you here. Why on earth have you followed me? is it to see me in my wretchedness and misery?" he asked fiercely.

"Why have I followed you, my boy, why, to take you back with me; what the devil do you suppose I have come all this way for, and a pretty chase you have given me for the last four months. This is the second time I have spotted you, Charlie, when you thought to escape me."

"Take me back, Sir John!" and he laughed discordantly—"never."

"Look here, Charlie," as he saw he was not to be trifled with, "I suppose you will give me something to eat, and a shake down to-night, at any rate; and if I do not prove before an hour is over that you are in error, then I'll go my way home again."

"My dear old friend," said the other, grasping the Baronet's hand, "all I have

is at your disposal; it is not much. Stay as long as you like; but ask me not to return—return where I was so deceived, so treated? I could never do it."

"We will not discuss the matter here, Charlie; by-and-by we will go into it. I have a regular party at your place, three peons, as they call them, and the man I brought from England with me. I was close on you at Southampton; you only beat me by a few hours. By George! how well you look, though; you are as brown as a berry, and bearded like a pard." He had not said a word about the Thornhills, or had Charlie mentioned their's or any one else's name; with his usual tact, and knowing Thornhill as he did, he forbore to say anything at present.

In a short time they reached the hacienda, where Charlie gave orders for making the men and horses comfortable, and the two sat down to dinner by themselves. They talked away, and Sir John gave him an outline of his adventures. They drank the wine of the acrocomia at

their meal; that over, they went on the flat roof, the azolea, as it is called, of the hacienda, to smoke a cigar, and enjoy a glass of Piñolé or Catalan; there was both to choose from.

"Charlie," said the Baronet at length, after a long silence, for both were busy with their thoughts, "you have a beautiful horse; shall you take him home with you?"

"Sir John," replied the other, gravely, "I shall never go back—nay, hear me out," seeing the other was about to interrupt him; "my lot is fixed. You know I am not a needy man; I have all I wish for, at least, I soon shall have. I intend to buy this place, and have already sent for all my things that will be useful to me here; but, of course, you could not know it."

"Now, Charlie, you must listen to reason; if you have sent for your things, I am certain they will not be sent to you. You have not yet asked after your uncle, or dear Mary; have you forgotten them?"

"Would to God I could!" replied the other, scornfully, "no, remembrance of my misfortune and my wrong is ever upon me; it haunts me night and day."

"Well, but, Charlie, suppose I prove to you that your cousin Mary is innocent after all—what then?"

"Do you think, Sir John, I can disbelieve my eyes? I saw them—his arm round her neck; I was as close as I am to you."

"No one denies it, Charlie; but surely it is not a great liberty for a brother to take."

The young man started back.

"Do not trifle with my misery," he said, mournfully.

"God forbid I should do so, Charlie; but, as I am a man and a gentleman, it was her brother."

"But I never knew she had one, Sir John."

"No, and you never would have known. Mary was under a solemn pledge to her father never to mention it. I did not even know it myself till after you had gone."

"But why all this mystery?" asked the bewildered man.

"Do you think, Charlie, it could be pleasant to talk of a disgraced son—a son who had done everything bad, one who had committed forgery?"

Thornhill sat without saying a word, his chest heaved, and he covered his face with his hands.

The Baronet, seeing he was deeply moved, remained silent, and continued calmly smoking his cigar.

"Charlie," he gently said, at length, "will you go home with me now?"

"No, Sir John, I could not; I should be laughed at; what would people say and think of me?"

"Think! They can think nothing, because they know nothing. All imagine you are gone to India on business of your uncle's. No one knows a word or ever will. The unhappy boy, Mary's brother, is gone back to Australia—from which he had no right to come, he was doing well there—it was that that gave him the means to come over. I had a letter from

Thornhill, before I left New York, telling me all. In years to come he may return to England, but I do not think he will, for he is better where he is. Now, Charlie, will you come?"

"But how can I ever look her, or my uncle in the face again, Sir John?"

"It was their fault, Charlie; it was a mistake not to tell you, but they thought it was a secret they would carry to their graves. Your uncle knew—he admitted it was a mistake, but it was no fault of Mary's, she could not break her oath. How soon can you get ready?"

"It will take a week to arrange all. I will return."

"Thank God, my boy, you have listened to reason. Now I am indeed happy. I must have another cigar and a glass of that Piñolé, it's devilish good."

The week passed rapidly away, and they were once again on their travels, and arrived safely at New York, Charlie bringing his beautiful bay horse with him which he intended as a gift to Mary.

Mary and her father were seated before

the fire one gloomy, rainy, dreary afternoon the latter end of January. They were talking of Charlie and Sir John.

"How strange it is, papa, we have had no news. Do you think anything can have happened to them?" she asked.

"It is not likely, Mary, but Mexico is a long way off, and Brazil still further. No, no, they will turn up, you may depend, when we least expect it."

"And where do the people here, papa, think Sir John is gone?"

"Oh, they imagine he is travelling for the winter. He generally used to do so, you know. The only ones in the secret are Lord and Lady Verriefast, and they are and ever will be as silent as death. You should take a little more exercise, my dear child. You never ride 'Sultan' now."

"And I never shall, papa, till he comes back," and tears rose in her eyes. "Poor dear Charlie, how beautifully he rode him in that steeple-chase when he was so ill. '*Won in a Canter*,' he said, as he came up to me so pleased. I remember the words

so well. I feel I should die, papa, if anything were to happen to him."

"*Won in a Canter,*" said the old gentleman, musingly, "yes, it was a favourite expression of his. I remember asking him something about you, and he answered in the same words. What's this, Johnson?" he asked, as the butler came with one of those mysterious yellow envelopes on a salver.

"A telegram, Sir."

"Good gracious, Mary, poke up the fire, and read it, I can't see."

Trembling did she tear it open, and read:—

"New York.

"Found—return to-morrow—meet us at Southampton."

The poor girl was beside herself with joy, and the next morning she was off to her friend Lady Verriefast to tell her of the news. A few days after the old gentleman and Mary started for Southampton, and put up at the 'Dolphin' in High-street.

They found the boat would be a couple of days before she was due.

"You will know in plenty of time, Sir," said the waiter, in answer to some question of the old gentleman's. "They are always telegraphed off the Needles. Our porter goes to the office, so you are certain to know in time to be down at the docks to see her come, Sir."

"The man who gives me the news," replied the old gentleman, "will receive a sovereign."

CHAPTER XI.

HOME.

Mr. Thornhill and his daughter were most anxious for two days, but on the third morning as they were on the pier the porters came to them with the news that the boat was coming, and would be in the docks in an hour and a half.

Long before that time they were there waiting its arrival. At last the noble vessel steamed in, and Mary's field-glasses were eagerly turned on to scan the passengers.

"I cannot see them, papa," she said, after having taken a long look.

"You may depend they are there, Mary. Have a little patience, and we shall see them."

It seemed an hour to her, before the

vessel came alongside, and then she discerned Sir John.

"There is Sir John," she exclaimed, "but he does not see us. He is talking to a gentleman with a large beard."

They were under the shed, where they could not be well seen.

"No, it is not Charlie," she continued, "though it is like him, But it is taller and darker. Suppose he has not come. Oh, what a disappointment."

They were now obliged to get further back, for there was a tremendous crush. Porters, customhouse-men, and others on the look-out for friends and relatives. The bridge is at last placed on the gangway, and then there is a regular rush, but at length Sir John is seen coming.

Her impatience was such that she darted forwards and caught hold of the Baronet by the hand.

"Ah, Sir John, I am so glad to see you. But where is he?"

"Why, don't you know me, Mary?" asked a gentleman close behind him.

She looked, and saw the tall dark man with the tremendous beard.

"Charlie, can it be you?" she exclaimed, "I knew you not so altered."

He gave her no time to ask further questions, but placing her arm under his led her away towards her father who he saw some short distance off.

"Charlie, Charlie," said the old gentleman, with tears in his eyes, and shaking him affectionately by the hand. "Welcome home, my boy. And God bless you for coming. I never thought at one time to have seen you again. Ah, Forest, my dear old friend, how are you?"

They were a happy party as they drove away.

"I should not have known you again, Charlie," exclaimed the fond girl, when they were in the hotel, "you are so much altered. So brown, so dark to what you were. Such an immense beard, it is very becoming though. And you are so much thinner to what you were."

"Now don't begin finding fault, you little puss," exclaimed Sir John. "Keep

him now you have got him. I've had trouble enough in finding him, I can tell you. I believe I've been half over the world for him. I never had such a hunt in my life, running heel too, most of the time. He was almost fixed for life, and if I had not arrived as I did would have been married to a yellow-skinned Mexican lady," and his eye twinkled maliciously as he uttered this.

"Never mind, Mary, what Sir John says," returned the young man, "I will tell you all my adventures. I must go back presently to see after my things at the Customs. Will you come with me?"

The two were not long before they started, leaving Mr. Thornhill and Sir talking over matters.

"Oh, Charlie," she said, as they walked along, "how could you leave me as you did? If you had only remained one instant, all would have been explained. You know not how wretched you have made us all. It nearly killed poor papa."

"I was mad," he returned, "maddened at what I saw. I have heard all from Sir

John, so do not let us say any more about it. You forgive me and my needless jealousy, do you not?"

"Yes, I will forgive you that, but not your going to be married to a Mexican lady."

"You do not suppose, Mary, that Sir John meant it, it was only his joke. I had only an old woman and a man, both Mexicans, one to do my horse, and the other the house and what little cooking I had. But here we are at the Custom-house. I will soon pass my things. By-the-by, how is 'Sultan?'"

"He is quite well, and looking lovely. Now we shall have some nice rides together. What did you do with your horse, Charlie, was it a good one?"

"One of the very best I ever had," he returned, "a glorious golden bay. He would eat out of my hand, and follow me like a dog."

"Oh, what a pity to have left him, such a dear and affectionate creature!"

"But I have not left him, Mary, I have brought him home for you, and a few other

little Mexican things besides. You will be kind to 'Rio,' I know, he is as good as 'Sultan,' and as handsome too."

Mary was charmed at her new horse, which that night was on his way to Yorkshire in charge of a man, and they were to follow in the morning, which they did, and that evening arrived at Linden Hall.

No one was more glad than Lord and Lady Verriefast to see the wanderer home again, and not a word was said as to his absence — it seemed avoided by all. Charles's health was now as good as ever it was. His last trip had wonderfully improved him, and he was eager to be married. He fancied the prize might slip from him yet. At last the day was fixed, and grand preparations there were.

The Moat was filled with visitors. Colonel Downey and his wife had come down especially, a grand ball was to be given the same evening, though of course the new married couple would not be present, they having taken a place at Ventnor for a month.

Such a crowd in the village church had

never been seen before. All came to see the wedding, and all admitted a handsomer couple had never been seen at the altar railings. When they were driving home to the Hall again, Charlie said:

"At last, my darling, you are my own. How well I remember my heedless words when your father asked me if it was all right with you, I replied, '*Won in a canter.*' It has been a deuced hard canter for me; but never mind, I do not care a bit what I have gone through now you are my own."

"And you will promise never to be jealous again, Charlie, never to doubt me?"

"Not as long as I live, Mary."

The wedding-breakfast was a grand affair. All their old friends were present, and many new ones. And most beautiful did the bride look as she appeared.

Then there were the toasts; Lords Verriefast, Lavender, Captain Slyfox, Sir John and Mr. Conyers had planned that Colonel Downey should, as the latest married man of the company—save Charles

—propose the bride and bridegroom's health, and which the old militaire cheerfully undertook to do.

"I rise," he said, when the time came, "I rise, ladies and gentlemen, to propose the health of the new married couple. I need not tell you how good, how amiable, and lovely the bride is—(cheers)—all brides are lovely"—(loud laughter). (Here he winked in a most indecorous manner at Lord Verriefast, and Mrs. Downey simpered, and played with her knife and fork) —"yes, all brides are lovely, especially when they have got any coi— money, I mean"—(cries of "mercenary creature" from the ladies, and laughter from the gentlemen). "I never tried married life till late in life myself, and, by gad, I'm—I'm—I never was kept in such order in my life—(loud laughter from all, but frowns from Mrs. Downey)—I thought they were pretty sharp on me as a youngster in the army, but, by gad, as an oldster I was never looked after so well as I am now." (Mrs. Downey here gave signs of going into hysterics. The Colonel, seeing the effect he had produced, thought it better to

modify it a little)—"But, by gad, ladies and gentlemen, it does me good. I wanted keeping in order, and a home, a comfortable home—(here he looked significantly at Lord Verriefast)—is a doocid comfortable thing, I can tell you (Mrs. Downey here regained her smiles)—and I may say I am doocid comfortable—(Mrs. Downey all sunshine)—when I see my—my wife's beautiful and accomplished daughter, Lady Verriefast, opposite me, I cannot help saying to myself there's a couple exactly suited to each other, they are, by gad! Verriefast's a devilish good fellow, and did a good stroke of business for himself when he made my wife's daughter Lady Verriefast. He did, by gad! But there is another who has done just as well, and that is my young friend Charlie Thornhill. I consider him one of the luckiest dogs in creation, and so, I am sure, you all think. Take my word for it, there's nothing like married life after all; and so you all seem to think down in this county, for I don't remember having known of so many proposals made in so short a time. There is

Verriefast married; my young friend, Turtlefat, there; Rasper as well; Shirkington Duffer; and, lastly, myself. There's something in the air, and I advise all about to marry, or thinking of doing so, to come and try the Yorkshire air. Well, I shall detain you no longer, but give you the health of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Thornhill. God bless them!" And the Colonel sat down with an inflamed face.

Roars of laughter greeted the old gentleman's speech, and then Charlie returned thanks briefly.

The carriage was at the door waiting to take them away to the station.

"You won't be gone more than three weeks or a month, will you, Charlie?" said old Mr. Thornhill. "I shall be so lonely without you, and so will all of us. There is still two good months of hunting."

"Why not come down, papa, next week to Ventnor, and see us?" said his daughter.

"If I thought, my darling, I should not be in the way I would."

"My dear uncle," put in the new married man, "nothing would give us so much pleasure. In the way? What nonsense!"

"Well, then, Charlie, I will come, for, upon my life, I don't know what I should do in this house alone. I'm an old man now, and cannot be away from those I love."

The carriage that was to take them away was at the door, and they were whirled off.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST OF THE SEASON.

The honey-moon is over, and Charlie is again at Linden Hall with his beautiful young wife, and are going through the regular routine of dinners, which are given to the newly married couple.

Her dearest friend is Lady Verriefast; who to look at that pretty, elegant, and well-dressed woman would recognise in her the Bessy Sprightly, needy and ready to catch at anyone. Her husband was justly proud of her—she was so quiet and unostentatious—she did the honours of her house so well, and never put herself forwards—she was a general favourite with both men and women.

Lady Verriefast was a success, and Mary was her dearest friend.

One fine brilliant morning, with a gentle breeze blowing, gentlemen in pink might be seen riding slowly towards Linden Hall, others rattled along in mail phaetons or dog-carts, well-hung barouches or landaus driven by the well got up coachmen.

It was the last day of the season—a lawn meet at Linden Hall—the liberal old squire was giving a breakfast on a grand scale, a huge table was already spread with all sorts of good and substantial food in the Hall for the yeomen and farmers, and another in the dining-room for the squire and his immediate friends. There was Lord and Lady Verriefast, Lord and Lady Lavender, Captain Slyfox and Lady Mary, Mr. Conyers, Sir John Forest, Mr. and Mrs. Turtlefat, Mr. and Mrs. Allsnob, and Mr. Blake, and many others—a goodly company.

"Well, Mrs. Allsnob," said Mary, we must call her Mary to the last, "you have had 'Rio' some time, do you like him? he is come home in beautiful condition; I am going to ride him to-day."

"He is as good and perfect, Mrs.

Thornhill, as he can be, you have indeed, two beautiful horses. I have brought my best to-day to live with you."

She was just as pretty as ever was Mrs. Allsnob, and six prettier women in any room were seldom seen than Ladies Lavender, Verriefast, Lady Mary Slyfox, Mrs. Thornhill, Mrs. John Turtlefat, and Mrs. Allsnob. Mary was certainly the most beautiful of all, and so her husband seemed to think as he looked fondly at her.

Such a cheer greets Charlie as he goes in the hall to see if they are all comfortable there. "Your health, Mr. Thornhill. Glad to see you in the pink again, Sir. Now we shall see what riding is," was uttered on all sides.

"I have come to drink all your very good healths," exclaimed Charlie, "I hope I may live to see you all here for many years to come."

Then there is another such a yell, tally oh's, gone away's, whoo-oop's, that made the great gong vibrate again.

"Charlie Thornhill!" as that gentleman returned to the dining-room, exclaims old

Mr. Conyers, he is on his legs, with his glass in his hand, "before we get on our horses, a toast I must give, yours and your dear wife's health—God bless you." Then there is another ringing cheer, and one gentleman who is not very well known having come from a distance, will give one more cheer all by himself, and then sits down rather uncomfortable as no one has joined in it.

There is a rush now; hats, whips, spurs, gloves are called for, some light their pipes, and others their cigars, and stroll about, looking at their horses or the hounds, which are close by, rolling over and playing on the velvety turf, or being brought to order by the "steady Rasselas" "down Gaylass," "hi back, Trueman," to one of that year's entry, who has a strong inclination to make a dart at Mary's Scotch terrier, who is standing on the Hall steps.

There is a rush for the horses, as the ladies are seen entering their carriages, and driving off to the first cover to be drawn, a couple of miles away.

Mary is on Rio, Mrs. Allsnob on one of her best, Lady Verriefast on her grey. Miss Dutchbild is also there, on a new horse and in a new habit.

There is Charlie, Turtlefat, Bouncer Brag, Lords Lavender and Verriefast, old Mr. Thornhill, Allsnob, Mr, Blake, *cum multis aliis*—all determined to see the last of the season.

There are several strangers from a distance to. Carriages and carts of all descriptions line the road towards the Meet.

"I think it is a holding scent, to-day," remarked Charlie to Lord Verriefast.

"I imagine it will be, Thornhill. Bessie has her second horse out."

"So has Mary," replied the other, "and Mrs. Allsnob as well. There will be some rare riding to-day, you may depend on it."

"This will be Lady Verriefast's last day," said his Lordship, "no more hunting for her. She may ride as much as she likes, later, but not hunting. I don't think any married woman should hunt, at least if they have any family."

"But Lady Verriefast has no family yet," returned the other.

"No, Charlie, no, but one does not know what may come—it's not prudent for Lady Verriefast to ride any more at present," and he said something to his friend.

"The devil, Verriefast, you don't say so."

"Fact, upon my honour, Charlie, you won't split, though of course the women have told one another long before this."

Such a Meet had not been seen for years, it was a favourite one; the squire's breakfast was a favourite one, the day was a favourable one, and all were eager and ready to be doing.

"Hoik, cover, hoik," and the pack are at it—the ladies are all together, and ready to be off the instant Reynard breaks.

Presently a tally-ho is given, and Reynard is away, and the field away too.

There is Lord and Lady Verriefast, Captain Slyfox, Charlie, his uncle, Mary Mrs. Allsnob, and Miss Dutchbild, Mr. Blake, all in a cluster and well off.

The hounds are running breast high, and the field are fully aware they are in for a stinger.

"Ride him out, Mary!" exclaimed her husband, "he will do all you want him, and Sultan will be ready for you. Fred is riding him to points. You are sure to nick in on him."

There was no occasion to tell her to ride him out, she was fully prepared to go from end to end, and so were the others.

It was a glorious sight to see four ladies all first rate horsewomen leading the field which they were doing.

Miss Dutchbild was in ecstacy, her new horse carried her like a bird.

The gentlemen had all their work cut out to live with them.

"By Jupiter, Charlie," exclaimed Lord Verriefast, as they took a flight of hurdles abreast, "the women are riding like demons. I shall be pumped presently."

"And so shall I," replied the other. "I think this is about the best scenting day we have had for some time."

"The sharpest twenty minutes, gentle-

men, this season," exclaims the old master, as he is getting on to his second preparatory to making a cast, but he was saved the trouble of doing it, for the hounds hit it off themselves without help.

The ladies have been fortunate in getting their second horses, and all are keen as ever.

The field is wonderfully pulled out now, for the pace has been tremendous, and everything has been taken without the slightest attempt to crane.

"You will want a third horse, Mary," remarks her husband, "if this goes on much longer—it's killing work. There he goes," as he caught sight of the sinking fox. "I thought this pace would be too hot for him."

But severe as it has been, all the riding men are well up.

Fine rider and beautifully mounted as she was, Mrs. Allsnob could not shake the others off. And amongst them was Miss Dutchbild, who had no second horse. She was nursing her new purchase carefully,

and in high glee at being able to live in such company.

The hounds are thrown out again, for Reynard has taken advantage of a large flock of sheep, and has gone right through them, and twisted and turned about in a most cunning and fox-like manner.

"Glad of this little check, at any rate," remarks Mr. Blake, looking at his watch. "An hour and ten minutes. Quite enough for me."

"And for all of us, I think," replied Charlie. "We are fourteen miles from home as the crow flies, and you are twenty; if this goes on some will have to lie out to-night."

"They've hit it again."

But the scent failed, and they were some time before they could puzzle it out, and eventually after some quarter-of-an-hour's cold hunting they ran the fox to earth.

"Dig him out!" shouted Bouncer Brag.

"Not for worlds, Mr. Brag!" replied the old master, "not for worlds! Such a fox deserves to live." He had got rid of another difficulty too. Had the fox been

killed he would not have known whom to have given the brush to. "Upon my word, ladies," said he, "the fox has done me the kindest thing he could do by going to earth. Who could I have given the brush to?"

"Oh! that is easily settled," said Lady Verriefast. "And I think Mrs. Thornhill and Mrs. Allsnob will agree with me; it was Miss Dutchbild's, for we have all had our second mounts, and Miss Dutchbild has ridden the same horse throughout; it was hers in all justice."

Those few words made Miss Dutchbild her ladyship's fast friend, for ever; for on the birth of her first boy, the maiden lady sent the baby such a present as seldom falls to the luck of infants in long clothes, unless they are royalty.

"Well, gentlemen," said the old master, as he was about to send the hounds home, "this is the last of the season, and I think we have had a good run, but what would it have been without the ladies? I'm proud to be the master of a hunt that can boast of such lady riders. We must give them, gentlemen, three cheers, they are all dear

friends of mine, and therefore of yours. And when I am gone to other hunting grounds, and you have still a recollection of the Wareheel hounds, don't forget old Bob Conyers and the last of the season."

Then three such cheers rent the air as were seldom heard, and all turned on their way homewards.

Mary and her husband did not get back till late, and after dinner Charlie had a long talk with his wife.

"Don't be inquisitive, Charlie," she said. "I can tell you nothing you do not know already. You men are always interfering in what does not concern you. Lord Verriefast has a very good reason for Bessy's riding no more at present; there now, go and smoke your cigar."

CHAPTER XIII.

YEARS AFTER.

My story has grown to a much greater length than I had intended, still I cannot close it without looking at the different characters I have taken through so many scenes. Death has removed none of them as yet.

Shirkington Duffer has, with the lapse of time and the judicious treatment of his wife, become quite an altered character. Ten years have passed since we last saw him almost at death's door, in a bath chair at Ventnor. He has two children, of which he is remarkably proud. He never has crossed a horse since his terrible accident; yet he has horses, and good ones too. On a November afternoon, during the season at Brighton, he may be seen

driving his wife and children, and of the numerous turns out there, not one carriage is so horsed as Duffers. His strawberry roans are admired greatly, and so are his bays. He still resides at the Farm; but always takes a house at Brighton for a couple of months, returning home two or three days before Christmas. With years he has improved in looks, and thinks no one on earth equal to his wife.

Bluster and he are as friendly as ever. Though still a bachelor, Bluster always talks of getting married. "You should have taken me, Mrs. Duffer," he would laughingly say. "Shirkington does not appreciate you."

But the lady knows better.

Major Rasper often comes over to see him. The hunting in that country does not suit the major, and he invariably goes to some place for the season, taking his wife with him. They have no children, and, being free, roam about just where they like. One year he will be in Warwickshire, another in Leicestershire, another in the Blackmore Vale. There is no

man in England better mounted or rides harder than the Major does.

Colonel Downey resides quietly at Cheltenham. He is somewhat gouty now, and has long given up hunting; so Mr. Spavin had his celebrated horse 'Jem Crow' back again. The old Colonel toddles to his club every day about two o'clock, and there he will remain till five, playing his rubber, or a game of billiards or pool. It takes a good hand to get the better of him, even now, at the latter game.

"By gad, Sir," he will gleefully remark, as he pockets an adversary, "the older I grow the better I play; I do, by gad. That makes six lives I have taken this pool, and I think I shall spot a maiden one. I'm a wonder. I am, by gad."

It is said that the Colonel makes a very good thing of it, and lands at least two hundred a year by his play. Mrs. Downey is grand at the evening parties, and is ever alluding to her daughter, Lady Verriefast.

"Her children are the most beautiful ones I have ever seen," utters the old lady proudly. "Her boys and the Thornhill

boys go to the same school. I dread when I know they are home for the holidays. They are up to all sorts of mischief; but their fathers indulge them in everything."

Mr. Conyers still hunts the Wareheel hounds. He is somewhat bent in his saddle now, but rides as forward as ever, and declares he will never give up the horn, till he is unable to mount his horse.

Lord and Lady Lavender are still as popular as ever, and likely to remain so. No one gives better dinners or parties than they do. Their house is ever open, as is their purse to relieve any want or distress. Captain Slyfox and his wife, Lady Mary, are quite as great favourites, and their two sons are just going into the army.

It is Christmas-day, and a large party is assembled at Linden Hall. The Verriefasts are there with their two boys and girl, the two former fine strapping lads of nine and ten, and the latter a charming little girl of seven. Charlie's boys are also at home, two boys and two girls, about the same age as the others. The children are

all at play in the park, and nurse Grimes is with them.

On either side of the fireplace are seated two old gentlemen, both with snow-white heads. These are old Mr. Thornhill and Sir John Forest. Not far off is Charlie himself, a fine handsome man, in the prime of life. He is somewhat stouter than he was, but looks the picture of strength and good health. Talking to him is Lord Verriefast; he also is stouter, and getting a little grey-headed, but otherwise little changed.

"Well Thornhill, my dear old friend," said the Baronet, "here we are again. Another year passed over all our heads. There is one thing time cannot do to mine or yours either and that is, make them whiter than they are."

"Papa's hair has been just as white for the last five years as it is now," said Mary, a beautiful woman. A little more rounded in form than she was some years back, but still a glorious beautiful figure, and a glorious beautiful woman. "I wonder what the children are at, Bessie?"

"Oh," replied Lady Verriefast, "they are amusing themselves in the park, old Nurse Grimes is with them they will come to no harm."

Lady Verriefast is more altered than any of them, she was just as pretty as she was ten years ago, but she has grown much stouter.

"I must go presently, Mary, and look at 'Sultan' and 'Rio.' Your husband tells me they are as good as ever. You know I have been four months away, and have not seen them since my return. I suppose you ride them as usual?"

"Oh yes, Bessie, every day. That is one one day and one the other, but they have not been hunted for the last eight years."

"I know, Mary," uttered her Ladyship. "Ah, what a difference married life makes to one. Directly after the birth of my first, Verriefast insisted on my giving up hunting. He is a dreadful man is Verriefast. He says it is not proper for married women to hunt, and that if they grace a meet in their carriage, it is quite

enough; but he hunts just the same as ever, himself. I don't think I could ride across country now, if I was to try."

"And so does Charlie," responded her friend, "he has four days a week, sometimes six. He was not quite so arbitrary as Lord Verriefast. I gave it up of my own accord, for I found I had so much to do. But I quite agree with Lord Verriefast, hunting is not the thing for women with families."

Their conversation was interrupted by an old but hearty-looking woman, nigh on four score years. She was followed by four fine lads, and three beautiful little girls.

"I don't know, Lady Verriefast, what you will say to Lady Blanche, and as for Miss Mary, and Miss Bessie, they're behaving shameful, they are, I can't do nothing with them."

Two of the boys had run to old Mr. Thornhill, and two to Sir John Forest.

"What is it, Nurse Grimes?" asked the old Squire.

"Why, Sir, would you believe that his

Lordship's eldest son and Master Charles went to the stables and got their ponies? they all ran away from me. What with old age and the rheumatics, I can't get about quite as fast as I could, and when I did come up to them, five of them was all crowded atop of the park roller. 'Come here, Nurse Grimes,' says they, 'there's a race.'

"'A race!' says I, all in a flutter, for I know how particular Missus is.

"'Yes,' says they, 'a race. Charlie and George have got their ponies. Look here they're coming, this is the grand stand, and we're the people.'

"And they begins to shout like mad, not at all like young ladies and gentlemen, 'Charlie wins,' 'George wins,' they shouts. I was fit to faint when I see the two young gentlemen tearing along with their jackets off, and no caps on their heads. They'll catch their death of colds, I'm sure. It's scandalous, so I've brought 'em all home."

"What's this, Charlie?" asked his father.

"Why, papa," said the noble boy, coming forward. "George said his pony could beat mine, and I said he could not. And we agreed to have a race, so we ran to the stables and got them."

"You young scamp," said Lord Verriefast, "no snap-dragon or blind man's buff for you this evening."

"Oh, never mind, Verriefast," put in the old Squire, "boys will be boys, regular chips of the old block."

"And what were the stakes for?" asked Sir John.

"Oh, we did not bet anything," replied boys; "it was all for love."

They were here interrupted by the entrance of John Turtlefat and his wife, who just came in. The gentleman was wonderfully altered, he was bearded like a pard, and looking far better than he ever did; he was quite a manly-looking fellow, and his wife just as beautiful as ever; but there was the same sad look about her which she had never shaken off.

"We have just run in, Mary, to say we

will come after all, and bring the children. Mrs. Turtlefat is much better, and she insists that we spend Christmas evening with you."

"Bravo, bravo, Mrs. John," exclaimed the old Squire, "the more the merrier, there will be a nice lot of them, pretty goings on I can assure you, Charlie and Verriefast were reading the riot act as you came in, fancy the young rascals racing on Christmas day, however it's not Sunday. What good can come to such lads?" and his eye twinkled merrily as he asked the question.

"We are all to go out with old Martin, the keeper, to-morrow," chorused the boys, "we are going ferreting, it's such prime fun. Papa and Lord Verriefast, when they are with us, and away from mamma and Lady Verriefast, say we are to enjoy our holidays, and we are all going hunting next week, when the hounds meet near. Mrs. Allsnob, her husband and Mr. Blake are coming too. Can't Mr. Blake ride, he showed me the way to ride over a hurdle the other day.

I came off twice such croppers, and so did George; but we jumped it at last."

"Well, you young scamps, get along with you!" exclaimed Lord Verriefast, "but here, let us know about the race."

"Well, Lord Verriefast," commenced Charlie Thornhill, "we got the ponies out, and started for a round of the park, from the roller, all round, and to the roller again. George went off as hard as he could, and I waited on him, like papa says he used to do. I thought presently his pony was a little tired, so I crept up, and about a hundred yards I came with a rush."

"Well!" exclaimed the old gentleman, considerably amused, "what then Charlie."

"I came with a rush, grandpapa, hands down, shook him off, and 'Won in a Canter.'"

THE END.